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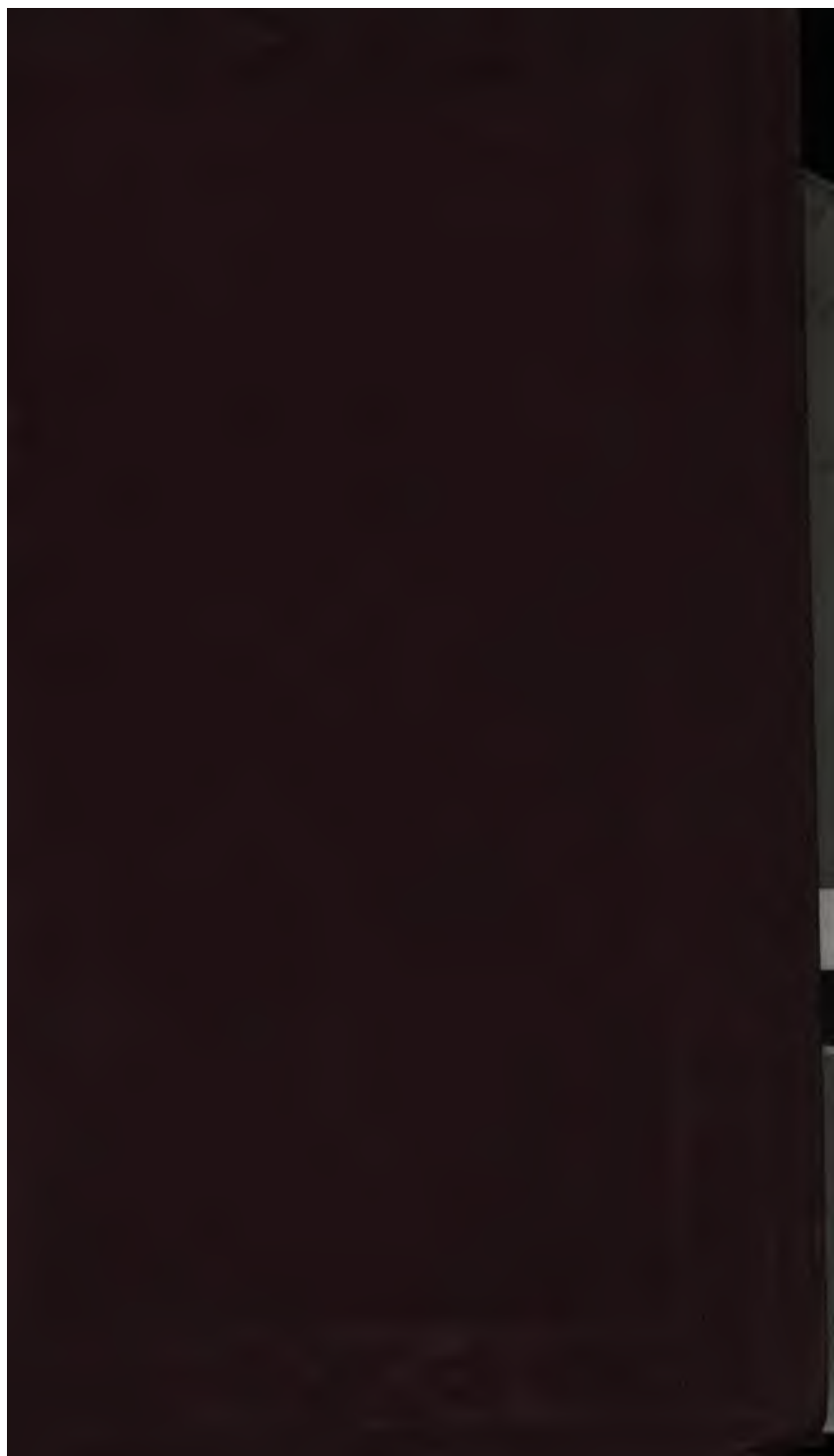
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N O E L ;

OR,

IT WAS TO BE.

BY

ROBERT BAKER AND SKELTON YORKE.

'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud,
'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired,
'Tis government that makes them seem divine.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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NOEL; OR, IT WAS TO BE.

CHAPTER I.

ONE BRIDE GOES AWAY, AND ANOTHER RETURNS.

Love, fame, ambition, avarice—'tis the same,
Each idle, and all ill, and none the worst ;
For all are meteors, with a different name,
And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.

Childe Harold.

“MISS WALLSTEIN,” said Noel Elliott one morning, when he was making a visit at Lady Mary’s, “will you undertake a commission for me?”

“Most willingly, Mr. Elliott; tell me what you wish.”

“I want all the children at the school to have new straw bonnets, with white ribbon on them,

for Margaret's wedding. I honour her shrinking from the vulgar crowd, but I think that those she has lived among and loved for so many years should have the means of rejoicing in her happiness. Moreover, sympathy on such occasions goes far to bind the hearts of the poor to us. I have arranged to give a dinner at the hall to every man and woman on the estate; and I should like the children to have bonnets, and a tea-drinking, and games—only I don't know how to manage to set them at ease; that needs a woman's tact, and Margaret, who used to do all such things for me, will be gone!"

Lady Mary longed to propose Joanna as Margaret's lieutenant, but she was fearful of seeming to push her into notice.

"Let the tea be on my lawn, Mr. Elliott; it can be in honour of the bride all the same; and if you choose, your housekeeper can send down the cakes."

Mr. Elliott accepted this offer: they were the best terms he could make.

The rector being ill, relieved Bertha of the pain

of having him at the breakfast, and made him thankful to accept Mr. Elliott's proposal to engage Mr. Marriott as a permanent curate. The wedding party was kept to the moderate bounds first arranged, but the school-children were allowed to strew the path across the field from Sylvester to the church with flowers, and the village matrons, dressed in their Sunday best, were gathered in the church as for a solemn communion. Profound stillness reigned during the service ; but a stream of prayer ascended on behalf of the loving-hearted woman kneeling at the altar, the solemn earnestness of which could only have been won by a lifetime of kindness and sympathy. As she left the church, muttered blessings quivered on every lip, and every eye was moist with tenderness.

It was an auspicious season for Mr. Marriott's first appearance among his flock. As the friend of Mr. Jans and "the good young lady at Lady Mary's," and the cordially received guest of the squire and Miss Elliott, all were predisposed in his favour. Poor Vansettle's manner was alternately dictatorial and familiar ; Mr. Marriott was

dignified in himself and respectful to others, even to the poorest. He was not a piece of perfection, a man found in theory, but not in practice. He possessed a large, loving nature; a solemn persuasion of the reality of sin and sorrow, and of love and joy; and an earnest desire to lead others to that close union with the Redeemer of our race, which can alone secure an entrance into God's presence hereafter, and the foretaste thereof in an upright life on earth. Mr. Elliott invited him and his family to sojourn at the hall until he should be able to throw two cottages together, so as to form a comfortable residence for them. He only wished to prepare thus a temporary abode, for he was of the same opinion as others, that the rector was not long for this world.

Not that Father John continued invalided, oh, no—he was able to go from home for a few days, and as Mr. Marriott was at hand for all church matters, he did not need to return for Sunday. He prolonged his stay to a fortnight, and then brought with him the notable Martha, clad in a green silk gown, red shawl, and yellow bonnet.

Betty, the charwoman, stood amazed at the sight ; for neither the bride nor the bridegroom had let out one iota of their intentions ; so when Martha flounced into the house, and addressed the rector as " John, my dear," and sat down with obtrusive ease in the parlour, Betty ejaculated,—

" Lord ha' mercy ! He surely hasn't married you ? "

" But he has, though ! And these are my every-day clothes, and I'm a lady. I shall keep a servant ; and if your girl wants a place, I shouldn't mind having her."

Both the rector and Martha greatly enjoyed Betty's amazement, and the latter continued to study further effect.

" To-morrow's Sunday," she said, " I shall sit in the rector's best pew, and wear my flowered satin. Law, how the sun do shine into this window ; my dear, we must really have a green finishing blind."

Betty rushed from the room, and Dr. and Mrs. Vansettle laughed loud and long. Then they called to Betty to set the tea, called for some

cheese to their bread and butter, and added a *quantum-sufficit* of brandy to the tea. Poor Father John was very happy, for he felt she would defend him from the bogies.

Great was the astonishment of the congregation in Irskill Church when "the Rector's Martha" bustled in, hugely crinolined, and dressed in glaring colours. She wore a gaudy dress, blue silk, with yellow and red flowers on it, and a satin stripe; red shawl, yellow bonnet, with feathers outside, and poppies and cornbottles in dozens inside; bright green gloves, and a mauve parasol. She sat straight up in the pew, read the prayers out of a book bound in violet velvet, and with gilt clasps, and smelt incessantly at a huge ruby bottle meant for a toilet-table, and which she had bought, believing it the newest fashion for ladies' smelling-salts.

In the morning she was up early to put the drawing-room into serviceable order, but she presently came to her husband, with discontent in every feature of her ruddy face.

"John," she said, "that 'ere drawing-room will

not do at all; we must spend a ten-pun' note on it. Don't grumble, for I'll have it done. That grate's horridly old-fashioned. I'll have one with an ormlore posy at the top, like that in the hotel where we was at Gravesend; and I'll have a marble chimley-piece, and a chiny handle to the door, instead of the old latch. I'll get a nice paper all over birds and roses, and I'll put it on myself, and a carpet to match. I've no pleasure in looking at the room since I've seen them grand hotels; and I shall feel quite shy when Lady Mary calls."

Poor Vansettle had been wholly guiltless of taking his wife to any hotel worthy the term "grand," but her experience was small in that line. It was still smaller in the judgment of ladies, and the usages of society; or she would have known that the inhabitant of the drawing-room was greatly inferior to the furniture, so much so that the ladies of Irskill, while they frequented the cottage home of Mrs. Marriott, would never think of noticing the promoted cook now ruling as the rector's wife.

So Mrs. Vansettle wore her finery day by day, and no visitors came to see it except the doctor, who continued to call on his patients, however outrageous their conduct. Dr. Vansettle was glad that affairs had turned out thus, for he felt sheepish about meeting Joanna or Miss Elliott; and since the affair of the sweep, had not felt at ease about the opinion in which he was held by the mass of his congregation.

Mr. Stanton proceeds across the fields from the rectory to call upon Miss Elliott. "I have been to see that human ass Vansettle, and found Mrs. Van strutting about like a peacock. In her last stage of existence she must have been that identical bird of Jupiter who drove all the poultry of the yard—geese, hens, and ducks—into a corner, that he might spread his tail before them. I think Vansettle knows he has made a fool of himself; he looks uncommonly sneaky."

"He did not marry Martha till he had sought a better connexion in vain," replied Bertha; "who do you think he fixed his ambition upon, Mr. Stanton? I'll tell you if you will promise it shall go no further."

"I'll promise. I believe he asked you?"

"Joanna Wallstein!" replied Bertha, slyly avoiding giving any answer to the doctor's question.

"Joanna Wallstein! The insolent fool!" exclaimed Mr. Stanton. "However, he has good taste; she is the prettiest little girl in the countryside, and the best. She would be a good wife for any man."

"Mr. Stanton, I believe you are in love with her!"

"Not exactly. The fact is, I am too busy to be in love. I would gladly marry, but I have no time to pay addresses. If a woman would become my wife she must court me. Also she ought not to be penniless—all that I can save must go to my four children, and I must only marry a woman who can provide for any family she may have. But I consider this no barrier in Miss Wallstein's case. I feel sure that Lady Mary will provide handsomely for her, and her tastes are so quiet that she would not mind staying at home to take care of the children while I go out to dinner. It

is necessary to my practice that I should accept three or four invitations a week, and my wife would have to be left with the children then, and for the whole of every day. You can tell Joanna this, and hear what she says about it."

"No, Mr. Stanton, I shall not name the subject to her. Joanna would worship where she loved, but she must first be worshipped before she can love. If once your wife, she would cheerfully sacrifice every pleasure for the good of you and yours, but there is a wide difference in a woman shelving herself out of love to her husband, and being shelved by him out of self-interest. I cannot recommend my pet to apply for the situation."

Mr. Stanton laughed, and said all ladies were romantic, but he was stung, though he did not choose to show it. Miss Elliott had accused him of discourtesy and self-interest towards the most fascinating and loveable of women. Was this true? He tried to pooh-pooh the whole matter, but his conscience kept on whispering, "See to it, for it is true."

But **Martha's** glory in her fine plumes was of

short duration; it was but for a few weeks that her married life continued. She tried too forcibly to restrain the doctor's growing love of spirits, and a fierce contest ensued. Vansettle stormed and raged till he suddenly became speechless, and though he lingered long, reason and speech never returned to him. The summer came and brought no relief; he ate, and drank, and slept, but his humanity seemed gone. One arm, one leg, the whole of one side, was paralysed. Thus he lived a while, and then one day another seizure came, and the flickering lamp went out, leaving the immortal spirit to go upwards, as a ransomed man, to his Maker, or downward like the beasts that perish!

CHAPTER II.

MRS. GRUNDY'S WORK, AND MRS. GRUNDY'S
WAGES.

The gossips of a neighbourhood
In some remote provincial town,
A scandalous chronicle at best !
They seem to me a stagnant fen,
Grown rank with rushes and with reeds,
Where a white lily, now and then,
Blooms in the midst of noxious weeds.

LONGFELLOW'S *Wayside Inn*.

“MAMMA,” said Sophy Hammerlye, as she followed her mother to her bedroom, after the rest of the family had retired for the night, “we must give a dinner-party. All our plans are flagging for want of refreshment.”

Mrs. Hammerlye sighed. In the retirement of that sacred retreat she looked a different being to that which she seemed in society. The larger

portion of her plentiful hair laid aside, along with her teeth, and the bloom carelessly rubbed from her cheek in the languor of the late evening, she looked a very old woman indeed.

“My dear, I am at my wits’ end. That odious tradesman at Brighton has dunned me for our bill again, which certainly is getting enormous. All our income goes in paying for the carriage and horses and the daily expenditure, and I have no chance of clearing off any old account, still less of being able to launch out. Unless we can bring one of these gentlemen to the point, we must leave the place. In any case, we must not incur fresh expenses.”

“Mamma, you are mad! Since Sir Henry’s return he has been very attentive to me. I hope each day that he may say something. I have not the least doubt that a judicious display that should convince him of our good means would induce him to propose. Only a bold player can hope to win. Give a dinner, regardless of expense, and I will bet ten to one that I nail the baronet, and Julia the wealthy young Penrose. Emma must

turn her powers to captivating the squire, and I have set her to read up political economy, and the rights and responsibilities of property to that intent, and also corked her bottle on the spiritualistic dodge. Trust all to me, and you may be sure of success."

"But, my love, I have so little money in hand. I cannot raise enough to purchase all the provisions required."

"Listen, mamma. I see my way out of that scrape. I will write to cousin Charlotte. I want to borrow her diamonds. I will ask her to negotiate all at Gunter's. He will send the second course ready, and a man to cook everything, also all delicacies of the season, and servants to boot."

"But we have no credit there!"

"Cousin Charlotte has, though, and by sending her she becomes the responsible person. She gives all her hug-a-mug parties in that style, and has dealt with Gunter for years. Now, have I not good diplomatic powers?"

"Excellent! But if you get your cousin into a disagreeable position, she will leave her fortune to the Skinners."

"Trust me! She will leave a large slice to Lady Dalzell, as sure as my name is Sophy Hammerlye. Now, mamma, I'll do you a good turn, too. You are too timid to be host and hostess in one, so we will ask Dr. Quiller to take the bottom of the table."

Mrs. Hammerlye coloured, independent of rouge.

"But won't he suspect?"

"Oh, you silly creature! What can be more correct, even pious, than thus to cling for protection to our clergyman? Go to bed, mamma, and get a good sleep, and see that you awake looking fresh and bright. I will undertake all arrangements, and we will have Dr. Quiller tomorrow, and persuade him that the whole scheme has originated with him."

Sophy acted out her plan. She wrote to her cousin for the diamonds, the dinner, and a dress-maker; diplomatically asking her advice about everything, because "down here we know nothing of fashions!"

Miss Charlotte Hammerlye was her father's

cousin, and, though worldly enough, possessed far more of the redeeming qualities of our nature than her young cousins. She was not attractive-looking, and her young relatives snubbed her as a rule, making the exceptive case wherein they deferred to her look brilliant by contrast. The little old lady was greatly flattered, did all they asked, and more. Pitying the sad case of Emma and Julia, who had no suites of jewellery to wear, she hired emeralds for the one and pearls for the other, and lent all her massive old-fashioned plate for the occasion unasked.

Dr. Quiller came to tea, and Sophy announced to him how much they required counsel.

“ My dear little mamma is in great perplexity, Dr. Quiller ; all the neighbours have shown us attention, and we should like to return their kindness ; we want you to suggest what entertainment we should give.”

The good man looked flattered. He was of spare figure, and his countenance expressed benevolence and distraction mingled. A Fellow of Oxford, and learned in sciences and languages,

extinct and extant, he seldom gave his attention to common-place matters; but no one more enjoyed a good dinner, a handsome face, and an insinuating address than he did.

"Ladies like evening parties, but both gentlemen and ladies like dinners," was his reply.

"Exactly so; how forcibly you put it! But I am so shy I dread a dinner, in my unprotected state," said Mrs. Hammerlye.

Any one less pre-occupied than the good doctor would have laughed in her face, so wholly did every line of her countenance, and every movement of her figure, belie her assertion; but he looked all tenderness and sympathy.

"Ah, poor thing, your position is trying! What can be done?"

"Oh, Dr. Quiller, if it would not be asking too much, would you take the post of honour and responsibility?" exclaimed Sophy, enthusiastically. "We should all feel so safe and right with you among us!"

"My dear, you presume on the doctor's kindness," rejoined her mother.

“No, no, not at all. I will do it with pleasure. I am glad I thought of it.”

“You think of everything that is good!” simpered Mrs. Hammerlye.

In the same manner the guests were selected, the doctor believing that he chose them all. Opinions were agreed till they came to Lady Mary.

“Lady Mary, one?” said Sophy, as she wrote the list.

“No, two,” mildly interposed Dr. Quiller.

“Governesses and companions are never asked out in society,” said Sophy, haughtily.

“Not generally. But Miss Wallstein is such a favourite with Lady Mary now, that I am sure she would not come without her. She is a general favourite, besides.”

Sophy longed to rebel, but her mother said entreatingly, “Put Miss Wallstein down, dear.”

Sophy complied, smiling at the double meaning in which the injunction might be carried out, and far more willing to act in the implied than in the plain sense of it.

“And Mr. and Mrs. Edward Walsingham should be asked; they are staying with his mother at the Court.”

So the arrangements were perfected. Sophy set her mother to play chess, and Dr. Quiller spent a happier evening than often fell to his lot, and departed, deeply impressed with the valuable acquisition that the Hammerlyes were to the Overstone society.

Sophy was large and tolerably fair. She was resolved to wear black velvet, but her cousin would not hear of it; so she begged her to procure her a simple silk dress, that would afterwards do for morning wear, designing it for a different purpose, and she bought the velvet, unknown to her mother, at a shop in the town, where they were gratified at the new family opening an account with them.

The dinner was a great success. The Overstone neighbours had never eaten such viands, or drunk such wine on any other private occasion. Sophy was devoted to the baronet, and he played up to her lead, anxious that Joanna should see

how much he was courted. A woman, in his eyes, was not most adorned when unadorned ; for the velvet and diamonds had greater charms for him than “ a meek and quiet spirit,” or than “ good works.” Joanna, in her simple muslin, with white lilac in her hair, looked like a wild-flower among gorgeous exotics. Dalzell noticed the contrast, and smiled ironically ; Noel noticed it, and remembered some lines by an American poet—

Thus I stoop, and thus I rise,
In the dark or gladsome hour,
Minding Him who made the skies,
He's my God, and I'm His flower :

and he felt nearer to God, and good, as he gazed upon her. Gazing was all that was permitted him ; for when, during the evening, he sat down beside her, asking,—

“ Miss Wallstein, what can I do with the old people living in those wretched white cottages ? I want to rebuild the tumble-down places ; but the old Prices take to howling, and declare they shall die the first night they have to sleep out of their old house ? ”

Sophy answered before Joanna,—

“Oh, I would let the roof tumble upon them, and see if they liked dying in reality better than in fancy!”

“That would not be your judgment, I think, Miss Wallstein!” he said, obliged in common politeness to yield his chair to Sophy.

“I should suggest some temporary repairs to avoid either death,” she replied; “the poor are closely wedded to habit.”

“That is just what my sister Emma would say. She dotes on the poor. She spends all her money on putting children to school.”

Noel was astonished and interested.

“She does not impoverish herself,” he thought: “that white satin dress was not bought for a trifle!”

Poor simple man, he knew nothing about unpaid-for finery, the finest finery of all!

Finding Sophy determined to keep her place he turned away, and Joanna had to endure ten minutes of patronage from the lady on promotion, while Elliott listened to Emma's prepared plagia-

risms on the poor and their needs. When Miss Hammerlye saw the squire fully engaged, she glided off, leaving Joanna alone, and was soon in deep conversation with Dalzell.

“You are taking no notice of Miss Wallstein to-night, Sir Henry!”

“I am too much dazzled by a brighter star!” he replied.

She cast down her eyes to give him leisure for a full gaze, and then said,—

“You were less dazzled at Christmas.”

“Ah, I felt it kind to show a little attention to a poor friendless dependant. We always do good works at Christmas. I was too poor then to give blankets and beef to paupers, so I gave notice to Miss Wallstein instead. Now that I can afford the former charities, I shall not think it necessary to mortify myself with the latter!”

“Why have Julia and Mr. Penrose stopped singing?”

“Because they are better employed. They glided into the conservatory ten minutes ago, and I have no doubt he is at this moment at her feet.

He is a sensible fellow, and Miss Julia looks divine in pearls and pink silk. You have, deservedly, the most costly of the jewels. I suppose they are an heirloom?"

"Yes; they were first worn by my great great grandmother. They are of great value."

"And does the plate descend from her, also?"

"Yes. We are very proud of our plate."

"And justly so. I believe some of it was in the last Exhibition. I remember having seen it before."

"It was so. Mamma has had immense sums offered for it, but she won't sell a single piece."

"With her income, she would be greatly to blame to do so. Your father was a merchant prince!"

"Yes; he possessed many ships, but it was an anxious business during bad weather."

"Does your fortune remain in ship-property?" he asked, carelessly.

"Ah, no; mamma said she would rather have three thousand a year from the funds than nine

thousand with the anxiety of possible losses. So she bought all into the funds."

Dalzell at once saw his way to eight hundred a year, and a good capital in jewels, &c., with Sophy Hammerlye, and he was dazzled in another sense of the word, and began to puff off his sorely involved estate, easily succeeding in dazzling her in turn.

Mr. Jans came round to Joanna,—

"You are going to sing?"

"Oh, no. Please don't ask me. The Miss Hammerlyes, and Mrs. Jans, and Mrs. Walsingham can do enough in that line. I should very much dislike to sing to-night."

"You look sad, Joanna. Why does the baronet avoid you?"

She laughed merrily, "I have not asked him the question. Shall I do so?"

"No, no. What a scoundrel he is. He is flirting up hill and down dale with that impudent woman. And his faithlessness grieves my sweet little friend."

"My dear Mr. Jans, please believe my solemn

assertion that Sir Henry Dalzell's conduct is wholly indifferent to me. You are far more to blame than he for my sadness, if I be sad."

"I! indeed, my child, I never grieved you intentionally. Tell me what I have done, and I will cry 'peccavi!'"

"You have taught me to look beneath the surface, and trace words and acts up to their secret spring. One cannot do this among the worldly, without being sad, and I fear, uncharitable!"

"I understand you perfectly. I feel the same. It is like grinning and dancing round the mouth of a pit, out of which our entertainers come, and into which they will return. The style of everything here is first-rate, but I feel as if falsehood was engraved on all the glitter."

"I fear it is shockingly uncharitable, especially as I have no reasons to give, but I feel as if the power of darkness had supplied plate, jewels, servants, viands, and all, and was giving away to his devotees yet costlier gifts, the souls of men. Young Penrose is taken in the snare, the baronet is following. Surely God will preserve His own."

She was pale as death when she spoke these last words; they seemed wrung from her by an inward horror, and her eyes had a far-seeing look as if a glimpse into the future were vouchsafed her.

“Joanna, my child, where all these things came from, thither they will return. If the glare be honest and true, it bears God’s stamp, and its costliness is no sin. All we have is borrowed, it only rests with us to care to whom we shall pay the hire. Also, if the souls of men are God’s, the smell of the devil’s fire shall not pass on them; if Satan’s, lo, he does what he will with his own.”

Jans had caught his young friend’s solemn tone, and led by his fears he left her side, to make a third in the conversation between Emma and Noel.

But his precaution was unnecessary; an image of purity and truth was enshrined in Elliott’s soul; he had welcomed that image once and for ever as a revelation from God, and he felt with the poet that—

God, and not woman, is the heart of all.
But she, as priestess of the visible earth,
Holding the key, herself most beautiful,
Had come to him, and flung earth’s portals wide.
He entered in: each beauty was a glass
That gleamed that woman back upon his soul.

Dr. Quiller was intoxicated with delight. As host *pro tem.* all the grandeur reflected glory upon him. He stayed till all had departed, heard Julia's engagement declared, and taking the opportunity of the girls leaving the room, he committed himself then and there to a declaration of love to the widow, and went away fairly and irremediably snared.

Sophy triumphed in her generalship. "Now, mamma, you'll trust things to me again, won't you? But we will keep your engagement secret till I bring the baronet to book. I have an appointment to meet him in the woods to-morrow evening, and then—and then——"

"It's hard on me," said Emma; "you had no right to allot me that impracticable squire! I make way imperceptibly slow."

"Nonsense, Emma, don't be faint-hearted. And mind you lock up your caricature. I saw that prying Mr. Jans peeping into your portfolio, and I trembled for what he might find there. You have gained upon the squire to-day; if you had seen the intolerable indifference with which he

regarded me, when I interfered with the *tête-à-tête* between him and his model of Pharisaic simplicity, you would have known that the interest he showed in you meant something. He is richer than Penrose, and has more sense than the baronet; positively he is the best prize in our lottery, and I would not have given him up to you, if I could have taken effect on him myself. He is far more manageable with you than with me. Miss Simplicity looked tremendously down in the mouth at Sir Henry's neglect, didn't she? Am I not an obedient daughter, mamma? You told me to 'put Miss Wallstein down,' and I put her down with a vengeance!"

"He spoke something quite confidentially to her when he was leaving. I noticed it, and I saw Mr. Elliott noticed it."

"It was nothing of any consequence, Emma. He told me he should take no more notice of her! You managed well to prevent Mr. Elliott talking to her."

"Of course I did. You ought to be grateful to me. Whenever Mr. Elliott was not talking to

Mr. Walsingham about the improvement of land, and its vermin the poor, I had my eye on him. Miss Wallstein had plenty of her own society this evening!"

CHAPTER III.

NO MERCY.

Rise above
Quibbles and shuffling off and on ;
Here's friendship for you, if you like ; but love,
No, thank you, John.—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

WHILST Sophy triumphed unboundedly over Joanna's discomfiture, and her own exaltation, the baronet indulged in soliloquy, the bearing of which would have astonished rather than pleased the daring aspirant for the title of "my lady."

"The devil take that girl," he said, "she casts a spell over me. My grand determination kept me from her side, but I never lost her out of my eye the whole evening, and often the low notes of that exquisite voice of hers caught my ear, when I was deaf to the eloquent words of that interesting young Jezebel by my side. I half

wish she had ruined all my worldly prospects by accepting my hand; life would bear a very different colour with that lovely home-like creature about one—but, oh, the cold mutton, and the stale pastry, and the Cape wine! No, no, as I said to my dad, I can't indulge in the luxury of falling in love to that tune. Surely, if there is an aggravating creature on earth, and one calculated to drive poor men out of their senses altogether, it is a lovely woman who is both poor and honest!—out upon them, they have no business to combine the qualities!”

He paced his room moodily, his countenance not indicating any close resemblance with that of angels, and continually decreasing in such similitude, until he spoke again.

“Curse him, curse him; the cool, patient determined brute! I see his game. With that open-hearted air, that blameless life, that half-fatherly, half-brotherly expression, and those broad lands at which he pretends not to care to cast a glance, he means to walk over the course and win. And, by heaven, he shall not do it!

People think I am a good-natured fool, and I partly am, but they little guess what is in me. I only want accomplices, and I know where to find them. Jezebelina will not strain at a gnat, unless she be coquetting at a coveted camel. She shall have both, if I choose; but Noel Elliott shall not have Joanna Wallstein."

The day following this night of meditation did not find Henry Dalzell in his most brilliant mood, and when Captain Welsh inquired of his whereabouts from Ensign Penrose, he received for answer,—

"He is in the stables, and is going to ride. If you will take my advice you will leave him to himself. He is unbearable to-day—right down dangerous."

Captain Welsh shrugged his shoulders and passed on, and Penrose soon saw Dalzell issue forth, put his horse into a gallop, and disappear like a flash of lightning.

"He'll ride to the devil!" he ejaculated.

If he had altered the preposition to "with" he would not have been so far wrong.

As he tore madly along, he passed many a field where the hay-making was going on merrily, and he heard the gay laugh, and the jests that caused it, and cursed the honest folks for fools. He cursed the children playing under the hedges, and the flowers they were crowning themselves with; and he loudly cursed every hay-waggon that he passed, for taking up so much of the road. The hay-makers rested on their rakes, as they listened to the ringing hoofs of his over-taxed horse, the children huddled together with looks of terror, and the carters voted him an "awful man," but touched their hats subserviently, hoping to appease his fury.

Perhaps their humility had that effect; perhaps it was the violent exercise which calmed him, for certain it was, that, after a ten miles' gallop, he pulled up short, and tying his rein to a gate, he climbed down a bank to a gurgling stream, and began bathing his head with the water. For some time he remained in that enticing woodland nook, and then mounting his steed again, he walked him slowly homewards, often pausing to

listen to the song of a bird, or to gaze upon a beautiful landscape or group of figures.

The lanes seemed deserted, the hay was housed in that district, and he felt alone in the world. This feeling grew oppressive to him, so much so that he congratulated himself when he saw a girl before him, carrying empty cans from some unseen hayfield.

“Good day to you, my girl,” he said, as he came alongside; “have you far to go?”

The girl curtseyed, as she replied,—

“I have done my errand, sir, and have only to walk home.”

“Home! and where is that?”

“At Irskill, sir. Father works for the lady.”

“Ah, ah!” thought Dalzell, “I see your fun, Mr. Noel. You may well hold yourself so indifferent to the Hammerlye girls, if you have such choice game among your labourers’ families. Those long eyelashes might rival Joanna’s, and the shy eyes are attractive beyond expression. She blushes, too, at every word—a rare indulgence with Joanna. I daresay her father keeps

his sunny peach in a net, to make the squire's mouth water ! ”

“ It is a long way to Irskill, my pretty one,” he replied ; “ would you not like a ride ? ”

“ No, thank you, sir,” she replied, with a deep blush, but her eyes said, “ if you please.”

Dalzell dismounted, and walked beside her. She turned to the hedge, and began nervously to gather honeysuckle and wild roses. Dalzell gathered some, too, and twined them round her plain broad hat. Again the blush and the shy timid look.

Dalzell unfastened his watch-chain and showed her a bunch of charms which depended from it.

“ These are pretty—are they not ? ”

“ Oh, lovely,” she exclaimed, surprised out of her shyness ; “ I don't know what they mean ; at least not all of them. But this pitcher is fit for an angel, and here is real gun and a flat iron. Oh, sir, what beauties ! ”

“ Which of them do you like the best ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know ! Maybe the gun, it is like the one our William carries, but the flat iron is so bonny ! ”

“What is your name, my dear?”

The shy look was there again—she curtsied low—“Jenny Jones, sir, at your service.”

“Jenny,” he said, “you are very young, I am old enough to be your father. I am a very lonely man—I wish I had a daughter such as you.”

“You are pleased to be very kind, sir,” she said, in a tremulous voice.

“Jenny, you have got such a pretty neck. You would look so nice with a ribbon round it, and the little jug hung to it. Would you like the jug or the flat iron—your new father will give you either.”

“Oh, sir! *give* me! For my own—my very own?”

“For your very own, my little Jenny!”

“Oh, sir!” said the girl, as she glanced upwards breathless and amazed—“Oh, sir!” she could say no more.

Dalzell began to detach the charms.

“Shall it be the pitcher or the flat iron, Jenny?”

“Whichever you please, sir.”

“But I want to please you, Jenny. Say which you like.”

“Please, sir, I think mother would like the flat iron best.”

“Then here it is for you. Tell your mother, Jenny, that the gentleman who gave it you said he was as good as a father to you.”

“Yes, sir. But, please, sir!”

“Well, Jenny, what would you say?”

“Please, sir, I hope I am not too bold. But you don’t look older than our William, sir.”

“And who is our William?”

“Brother William, sir.”

“That is, because I have had no hard work to do, but I am nearer the age of your father.”

Dalzell knew he was speaking falsely, but men like him read character quickly, and he saw he must take care not to let Jenny fancy him anything lover-like.

“What do you do for your father, Jenny, when he gives you a present?”

“Light his pipe, sir, and—” she hesitated—
“give him a kiss,” she continued, in a low tone.

“ Well, then, repay me so for the flat iron.”

“ I dare not, sir.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ It would be so bold.”

“ Not when I asked you ! ”

“ Mother would be angry ! ”

“ Mother would not see. And you know I have promised to be a father to you, so she would be sure not to object. I'll come and see her some day.”

“ Mother will be honoured, sir.”

Dalzell bent over the shy girl, and kissed her once and again ; her poor little heart fluttered painfully, and she burst into tears. He took out his cambric handkerchief to wipe the blushing face. Jenny's was a sensitive nature, and the low tones of his voice, as he poured consolation into her ear, his gentle touch, his perfect self-possession restored her to tranquillity, and made her feel him a being of angelic charm.

“ You are tired, my little daughter,” he said ;
“ my horse is so gentle, you shall ride upon him.”

She was preparing a timid remonstrance when she found herself lifted gently from the ground and placed on the horse; the day was hot, and the excitement had unnerved her, the rest and novel position was refreshing, and she smiled joyously down on Dalzell.

With one spring he placed himself on the saddle behind her, holding her closely with his left arm, and kissing her again and again. They had been progressing slowly, and were wholly unaware that an old woman, the evil genius of the village, had been hanging in their rear, not near enough to hear their words, but within sight of their actions. Off they rode in a brisk canter to the delight of Jenny, passing the hay-fields and the loaded wains, the poor child thinking no evil, and fearing no blame, till she alighted at her mother's door, and ran in joyfully to show her delightful flat iron.

And Dalzell rode forward. Presently he espied another figure before him, at sight of which his heart gave a bound. Joanna Wallstein was walking to Overstone: Lady Mary had driven in

with Mrs. Jans, and Joanna was to pay some visits of charity on the way, and meet them in the town to give her judgment in the choice of some clothing. She was proceeding with a light elastic tread, her white muslin scarf floating in the summer breeze, and her simple hat adorned with one wilding spray of white roses, which her guardian had playfully entwined there, before directing his steps to Elliott's Cray.

Dalzell sprang lightly from his horse, and advanced to her side,—

“Good morning, Miss Wallstein, or, I should rather say, ‘Good evening,’ for the shadows are lengthening. I am glad to see you are no worse for our dissipation last night.”

“No worse, thank you,” she said, with a quiet smile. “Lady Mary and I found our excitement did not in any degree interfere with our rest.”

“I wish I could say the same! Last night was torture to me!”

“What, the dinner-party?”

“The dinner-party, and those loud girls. It is a

positive misfortune to be so rich as to feel obliged to load yourself with dress and jewellery."

"I cannot imagine such a necessity. But I think the Miss Hammerlyes looked exceedingly well last night; their very handsome costumes became them admirably. And," she continued, "you looked as if you thought the same."

"Looks are deceptive things, Miss Wallstein."

"They often are. But surely they ought not to be."

"Ah, you don't know the world. You have been sheltered in the lap of affection, kept from the knowledge of evil; you do not know how strong the necessity of temporizing may be, nor how fierce may be the storm of danger which plain-dealing may bring upon oneself, and those one would most tenderly shield."

"As you say, I am very ignorant of the world. But I cannot imagine a danger I should so much dread for myself, or one dear to me, as the danger of any tampering with truth in word or deed."

She looked a very embodiment of womanly courage as she spoke, and her step grew firmer,

and her head more erect, as the thought of suffering for right took possession of her being.

“Yours is an uncommon nature, Miss Wallstein, pure and lofty in the extreme. You must not judge others by yourself. Suffering is meant to be a horror to us, and we must each escape, and make a way for escape to others, as our powers dictate.”

She did not reply. His sentiments were antipathetic to her; but he looked so ill she could not but pity him; he continued to seek her sympathy.

“Yes, Miss Wallstein, I was in absolute torture last evening. I can see that that ruthless Miss Hammerlye means to be Lady Dalzell.”

“Sir Henry, spare me these explanations. I recoil at such an accusation against any English maiden. Miss Hammerlye cannot have designs on you unless you have sought her regard, in which case it would be the deepest dishonour to speak of her thus.”

“The old story! Such ample virtues are bestowed upon you that you can afford to dis-

pense with justice. But I warn you, that woman hates you with an intense and bitter hatred!"

"Hates me! Impossible, Sir Henry. I am almost a stranger to her, and quite innocent of in any way interfering with her."

"Listen to me, Miss Wallstein. Sophy Hammerlye is so furiously jealous of you, that had I paid you attention in her presence your life would no longer have been safe."

Joanna laughed heartily.

"Sir Henry, you amuse me unutterably. Your nerves are shattered with all you have undergone, and the old nursery tales of witchcraft have returned on your memory. I believe you picture Miss Hammerlye with a waxen doll bearing a likeness to me, and she sticking pins therein, melting it before the fire, and otherwise torturing it, while in the meanwhile I fade away racked with unaccountable pains!"

He smiled sadly, but her mention of "all that he had undergone" put him on a new tack, and he changed his cue accordingly.

"I may well be nervous, Miss Wallstein, having

so recently laid my only relative in the tomb. To me life is indeed 'cold and dark and dreary.'"

"You cannot fail to feel it so at present, Sir Henry; but, after a while, you will learn that 'behind the cloud the sun is still shining'—the gloom will not last for ever."

She spoke gently, and her expression was kind and friendly—he sunned himself in her softened mood.

"There is but one who could dispel the gloom of my life, Joanna—your love would at once flood my world with sunshine."

"I told you before, Sir Henry, that I could not give it to you," she said, pained and offended at his variable treatment of her.

"But I was not the baronet then. The title and estates are now in my hands!"

She turned upon him a look of unequivocal contempt.

"Your tactics are unaccountable, Sir Henry Dalzell; you were 'too wise to stake your knight against a pawn,' and now you imperil your castle. Happily for you I am not an ambitious woman,

and it is even more easy to me to say 'No' to the baronet actual than to the baronet expectant."

"Ah, I see how it is! That fool Vansettle has been blabbing. He tells lies by the score, I thought you had been too strong-minded to believe him."

"Truth carries weight even in the mouth of one untrue. That those words were used by you is proven by your use of the word 'blabbing.' To invent falsehoods is not to blab. You spoke a while ago of the necessity of using such words and manners as suit the society you frequent; when you do me the honour to affect mine, could you so far oblige me as to speak and act truthfully?"

"I am doing so when I ask for your hand. You have taught me to be unworldly—I never meant to marry you till you showed me that you understood my dealing with you. I then proposed to you out of pique. But I have tried in vain to forget you. I am poor for a private gentleman—a beggarly baronet! I need a wife with a fortune, yet I can face poverty for your sake. Marry me,

and you may make me such as you wish : no one has ever had influence with me before."

"I cannot, I dare not, accept such a responsibility. I cannot love but where I worship, and I can only worship truth, uprightness, sentiments and actions that are God-like. It is not for a woman to lead and control a man—at any rate, I am far too weak a woman to do it : I am often too sorely in want of help myself in my upward striving. I spoke bitterly a while ago, but now I speak in solemn earnestness. I cannot ever love you, and to marry without love is abhorrent to my nature. Forgive me if I pain you, it is better to make you fully understand the futility of all efforts to win me than to let you try, and fail. Let us avoid one another, and forget that we have ever met."

As she spoke thus, her head bent down and her cheek deeply flushed : Noel Elliott rode past. His quick penetration saw at once that it was no common chit-chat going on between them, and he put his horse into a brisk trot, only bowing as he passed them. When he turned a corner of the

road, and they lost sight of him, Dalzell looked searchingly into Joanna's face, his expression almost demoniacal, just what it was when he discussed the claims of Elliott in soliloquy.

"Perhaps, Miss Wallstein, you have hopes in that direction; that soft dupe of a German hanger-on probably possesses those divine attributes which you could worship. But you are too late in the market: he is the cavalier of Emma Hammerlye, and he shall not jilt her for you."

"Sir Henry Dalzell, had I a brother, or were Mr. Elliott even within hearing, you dare not have spoken to me as you have done just now. Mr. Elliott is an earnest-minded, true-hearted gentleman, and never sought to win a thought from a woman unless to reciprocate it in all truth and reverence. Your insolent words referring to my oldest friend, Mr. Jans, were equally unjust; but, as I know they were chiefly intended as an insult to me, I shall offer no defence. Leave me now, and never intrude yourself on my presence again."

"Madam, I leave you, but you shall repent

having ventured to use such a tone with me. Again I say, you shall not marry Elliott."

"Confine your threats to matters within your jurisdiction; with me and my affairs you have no concern."

He sprang upon his horse.

"Nevertheless," he said, as he looked back at her, "my words *shall* be true." He lashed his spirited horse, it reared and flew forward, and she soon lost sight of him.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSPIRACY.

Es gibt starke Seelen
In dem Geschlecht. Ich will in meinem Beiseyn,
Nichts von der Schwäche des Geschlechtes horen.

SCHILLER.

HENRY DALZELL was somewhat late for his promised tryst in the beech-wood, but the fair Sophy had not grown weary of waiting, albeit her spirit had chafed somewhat at the delay. She welcomed him with wreathed smiles, uttering well-selected platitudes about the exquisite evening, and the lengthened shadows, and the soul-refreshing stillness. Dalzell did not notice her words, but burst forth with his own stormy cares.

“Miss Hammerlye, there is a creature in this neighbourhood whom I hate—deeply, intensely. She is an artful creature, and is playing a deep

game, so deep that she is likely enough to check-mate us unless we have recourse to carefully-laid schemes of warfare. Give me your hand, and promise me your aid in soul and body !”

Sophy’s cheek crimsoned, but not with womanly modesty, nor with womanly joy. She interpreted the baronet’s words, “Give me your hand” as a proposal of marriage; and her heightened colour indicated the wild triumph of a gamester who has played ruinously high, and, by a sudden turn of luck, has become a millionaire. She placed her hand in his, exclaiming—

“You have made me your own in body and soul—I will serve you with both, and the more readily if your warfare is carried on against that sneaking hypocrite, Joanna Wallstein.”

He smiled triumphantly, led her to a fallen tree, and, seating himself beside her there, he stated his case—

“Miss Wallstein imagines she has two strings to her bow. She would fain become Lady Dalzell, and meek and retiring as is her conduct in public, in private she persecutes me with importunate

attentions, so that I can scarcely stir abroad without being subject to her wearisome adulation. This very evening she has lain wait for me, and I had to be downright rude to get away from her ! ”

“ Just like the sneak ! But you are safe from her : you understand women too well.”

He gave a wicked laugh, but Sophy was not sensitive, and where Joanna’s high soul would have felt the jar of a malicious tone, she echoed indiscriminately the laugh of innocence, or the sneer of scorn and cruelty.

“ You are right, fair Lina : do you mind me calling you Lina ? I have a strange attraction for the name.”

“ Call me what you please, dear Henry,” she replied, with a tender air ; “ any name in your lips is sweet. Is it the name of any person with whom you have been in love ? ”

“ No, beautiful Lina, it is a fancy name, and has no being annexed to it, except in my imagination. In face, you are my ideal, Lina.”

He did not deem it necessary to add that Lina was but the abbreviation of his fancy name, the

full one being Jezebelina, which, for certain reasons, he had thought so appropriate to herself. She looked gratified by his fancy, and he proceeded with his explanation.

“But you see, my Lina, the sneak may check-mate us, without taking my castle. We are playing for Noel Elliott. I am one string to her bow, and he is the other. These pious girls do not pray and sing psalms except at high game. If Miss Wallstein cannot be Lady Dalzell, she will content herself with being mistress of Elliott’s Cray.”

“And do you think she is likely to succeed?” asked Sophy, uneasily.

“Very likely. Elliott is a kind of prosaic knight-errant. He is just the man to marry a penniless girl, because he found out that she was spoony about him, or even because some gossip had mingled their names. He is a weak, morbid muff, with manhood enough to feel drawn to woman, but with too maundering a conscience to put forth his hand and take the offered fruit, for fear of being naughty. The man is very fond of Miss

Wallstein, and is only held aloof by a fastidious sense of honour, which makes me laugh immoderately. I see that he believes me to be Miss Wallstein's lover, and so he always assumes the tone of a pious mentor, a warm and disinterested friend."

"Oh, Henry, you must keep up that impression, and we must throw Emma upon his protection. I will write him a letter appealing to his generosity, and revealing to him that she is hopelessly in love. We will bring them together, and make people catch them, and then he will think her reputation is at stake!"

"Admirable Lina!" exclaimed the baronet, "you are at home with stratagem. Put your magnificent schemes into action as quickly as may be, and let us confer again to-morrow in this place."

"To-morrow evening we have an engagement."

"Till what hour?"

"Oh, we shall be at home by eleven. The best of these flat parties is, that they are soon over."

"Then meet me here at midnight."

Sophy agreed to this proposal, and he chuckled

at seeing how wholly she was in his power. With all her daring boldness, with all her strategic powers, she had no protection half so potent as Joanna's maidenly prudence.

The hours of the following day hung heavily on Dalzell, until he remembered his new friend, little Jenny Jones. He ordered his horse and went off to see her.

But he rode along the lane without catching a glimpse of the dainty maiden. For some time he hesitated to seek her at the cottage, but, reflecting that it was pretty certain the father would be at his work, he made up his mind to face the mother. He dismounted, attached his horse to the garden-gate, and knocked at the low door. Mrs. Jones opened it; she recognized the chin ringlets and the lordly air, and curtsying low, but with a look of ominous solemnity, she asked, "What the gentleman pleased to want?"

"I called to inquire after your daughter, Mrs. Jones. I am right in supposing she is your daughter?"

"Jenny's my daughter, to be sure, sir."

"I thought I could not be mistaken. She is so like you!"

Mrs. Jones was a hard-featured woman, and signally unlike her pretty daughter, but she was none the less pleased with the implied compliment.

"I hope your dear little girl was none the worse for her fatigue yesterday; she is too young a child for such long journeys."

"Lor' bless you, sir, how old do you take her to be?"

"Ten, or perhaps eleven years old. Her infant graces quite touched my heart, and awoke in it all a father's tenderness."

"There now, how we do miscall people's ways. Why, father thought as how you was making love to t' wench, and that no good could come on it!—while you was counting her but a bairn, and minding her accordingly. We owes you thanks, sir, for your condescension, and for the bonny flat iron you gived t' wench; but, sir, we suld like you to take it back, for all t' folks knows that our Jenny's a woman grown, and they look

shy at her for riding on t' horse, and keeping company with you."

"How foolish, to be sure! Why, of course, I could only look on so lovely and childish a creature with a father's eye! I will come into the house and speak to the child."

"She is not here, sir."

"Then where is she?"

"She has gone as under-housemaid to the hall, sir," said Mrs. Jones, with evident pride. Dalzell laughed sardonically. He wished Mrs. Jones good-day and rode forward.

Presently he reined his horse at the door of Elliott's Cray, and asked for the master. Noel was cold and reserved, very different to what he used to be with the baronet; but his visitor, judging others by himself, was at no loss to guess the cause. He spoke of the alterations Mr. Elliott was making, expressing the greatest interest in them, but this provoked no invitation to inspect the improvements. At last he asked his host point blank to show him the alterations he was making.

Noel could not refuse so simple a request, and conducted him to the conservatory, armoury, and drawing-room. Dalzell heard a knocking in the library, and opened the door uninvited. Three women-servants were dusting books, while carpenters were putting up new shelves—one of those three was Jenny. She looked up as the gentlemen entered, and turned scarlet as she recognized Dalzell. She had her arms full of books, and, in her confusion, she let some fall.

“Leave the books and go to the kitchen, Jenny,” said Noel, in a somewhat stern tone; Dalzell whispered something to her as she passed, and Elliott drew him away by another door. As soon as they were out of hearing, he said, “Sir Henry, I reckon a dishonour done to a servant in my house as a direct insult to myself. I am the protector as well as the master of my household.”

“Very beautiful!” exclaimed Dalzell, with a sarcastic air; “I understand clearly. I am on your preserves, and must keep my eyes off Hagar, if I don’t desire a poacher’s fate!”

“What do you mean, sir?” asked Elliott,

drawing up his grand stature majestically, and confronting the baronet with a look of calm courage and heart-purity which made him quail.

“Nothing at all. What a peppery fellow you are, Elliott! Why, you would fight your own nursling for hinting in joke that you could intrigue with a pretty girl. Were you ever at school?”

Elliott laughed. “I was at Eton and at Oxford, and I know men’s ways well enough. But as I know, so do I utterly loathe them. My nursling must not pull off flies’ wings and tie young birds by the legs, if he wants nurse to be indulgent to him. Nurse hates cruelty, and will give cruel boys to the bogie-man.”

Dalzell answered the repartee in kind, but was glad enough to take his leave.

CHAPTER V.

THE OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN.

The master of a well-ordered home knoweth to be kind to
his servants ;

Yet he exacteth reverence, and each one feareth at his post.

MARTIN TUPPER.

“ You are over-fatigued with your walk, dear,” said Mrs. Jans to Joanna, as she joined her at the workshop. “ I will make Tom walk home, and you shall occupy his seat. Lady Mary has promised to spend the evening with us, and I shall hope to get a quiet chat with you during the evening.”

Joanna smiled her thanks ; she felt weary in spirit far more than in body, and though she had never knowingly entertained any expectation of being sought by Mr. Elliott, and, in the moment of her deep offence, had ridiculed the idea of Sir

Henry Dalzell being able to decide her fate, yet his words had left a heavy anxiety at her heart, and she trembled lest he should be able to prove the validity of his threat.

The wearisome shoppings are over at last, and the trio return to Sylvester. Bertha and Jans welcome Joanna right cordially, and she feels refreshed and reassured by their kindness.

The tea was still on the table when Noel Elliott entered, and they all felt that his presence perfected their group. They chatted happily, each spirit in harmony with its fellows, each secure of the true regard and affection of the rest. Joanna was now cheerful as ever, and her peaceful gladness spread its influence over all.

“You are looking a different being to what you were in Overstone,” said Mrs. Jans; “I cannot but think that those long walks are too much for you.”

Joanna blushed deeply, for she caught Noel’s eye. Of course, he misinterpreted her blush.

“No, no, Margaret!” said Jans, “they are not too much for her; she is well used to them, and she looks extremely well. I am proud of my pupil.”

"Of me!" exclaimed Noel; "dear old Jans, how kind of you!"

"Nonsense, Noel, you never were my pupil. You know very well that I meant Joanna."

"The world says different. It says that I was your pupil. You were Gamaliel, and I St. Paul, sitting at your feet."

Jans laughed heartily. "You St. Paul, I like that idea; you, an obstinate, self-willed, head-strong fellow, who never followed any man's way but your own! You were like the original Saul, more occupied in opposing and controverting wise counsels than in adopting them."

"He is maligning me! Don't believe him, Miss Wallstein. He said the cottages wanted repairing; I have rebuilt some, and repaired the rest. He said Fuller's land wanting draining; a dozen men are at work there now. He scolded about there being no school but my aunt's capital institution; I have built one, and procured a master. Am I not tractable and diligent?"

"Diligent enough, but you are following your own will, not mine. I was occupied entirely with

principles and with generalizations; you took my theories and reduced them to practice; you applied my generalizations to individuals. Did I ask you to do so? By no means: I should have been well content to make you theorize. And you know I forbade you to smarten up Elliott's Cray, until you had got a mistress for it, and you are defiantly building a new conservatory, renewing and repairing the oak-carvings in the armoury, and are about to turn a band of decorators into the drawing-room."

"I want interest and employment, Jans. I see no hope of a mistress for Elliott's Cray. Don't lecture me on that head: I see all the advantages to myself and my people in bringing a lady there, but I don't see how it is to be done. There are so few ladies who come in my way, and none within my reach come up to my standard."

"The Miss Hammerlyes must measure as high as any man's standard! There are three of them ready for marriage, and the choice is before you."

Noel shuddered. "They will find more suitable mates, and I shall sink into a confirmed old

bachelor. Aunt Bertha, will you take a turn in the garden? I want your advice."

"Please, ma'am, there's Dame Jones come to speak to the squire; she has been to the hall, and has followed the master down here."

"Let her speak to him in the garden," replied Bertha. "If she goes round, we will meet her there."

Mrs. Jones advanced with low curtseys; she looked sorely troubled.

"What can I do for you, my good woman?" asked Noel.

"Why, sir, that's more than I can tell. My heart's breaking, and my master's heart's breaking, and, says he to me, 'Go up to the squire,' says he; 'he's a scholar, and he'll hit on some way of righting the wench;' and that's just what he said, sir."

"But who has wronged the wench?" asked Noel.

"Why, it's not to say wronged, sir, at least only in a roundabout way. But a bad name is as bad for a wench as a bad heart; but, sir, I

swear in the sight of God Almighty, that the wench is as innocent as yourself. I hope I'm not disrespectful, sir."

"Not at all, Mrs. Jones; but I want to know what has happened; tell me, first, how all this began."

"To be sure, sir. Well, then, firstlings, we sent Jenny to the hayfield with victuals for the haymakers; we hadn't no one else to send, sir, and it's a cheerful road up to Ivelet Hollow, if it is a bit lonesome."

"Quite so. You did perfectly right to send your daughter on such an errand."

"God bless you for that word, squire. Father says, 'I wis we hadn't sent her;' and says I, 'Could I tend on her like a lady's-maid, and mind the childer at home too?' and, says he, 'Maybe not, dame; but I'd rather we not sent her all the same.'"

"Go on, Mrs. Jones. What harm came to little Jenny?"

"Why, sir, it isn't to say harm, except that evil tongues make it so. The gentleman talked

quite fatherly to her; and if he did give her a flat iron off his goold chain, he said, ‘Show that to yer mother, Jenny.’”

Elliott looked annoyed.

“I gather from your words that Jenny met a gentleman in the lane, and he talked to her; but I can’t understand how he came to give her a flat iron.”

“He told her to hang it round her neck, sir. ‘And,’ says he, ‘Jenny, when your father gives you summut, what do you do?’ and when she said as how that she kissed her father, he said, ‘Just do the same to me.’ And Nanny Hobson was coming along the lane, and she’s telled it in all the town that the gentleman had our Jenny in his arms, and was kissing her and going on with her; and all the town’s up against the wench, and she daren’t go outside the door.”

“Do you feel sure that Jenny has told you the whole truth?”

“Certain, sir. Father said he’d take the strap to her if she hid a word from us, and the little wench thought on of every word.”

“Have you any idea who the gentleman was?”

“Why, sir, Jenny says as how he had ringlets to his chin, and a grand moustache curling up like a drake’s tail; and father says he thinks it would be the gentleman as was laid up at the hall; he has seed him often at Lady Mary’s.”

Bertha started, and Noel knit his brows.

“Can you walk as far as the cottage, aunt Bertha? I should like you to speak to Jenny.”

Bertha readily consented to go, and they proceeded to cross-examine the girl.

Poor little Jenny sat on a three-legged stool, her apron thrown over her head. She was very pale, but she blushed deeply at sight of the “quality.” Bertha took her aside, and to her the girl told accurately all that the reader already knows of the rencontre with the strange gentleman. Bertha watched the sad face, as the tears gathered on the long eyelashes, and dripped like drops from the eaves of a thatched house. The girl evidently admired the gentleman, and any censure of him gave her acute pain; but Bertha was fully convinced of the child’s honesty.

She returned to her nephew.

“ There are two dangers before the girl, I see ; first, the blame of her equals, which may drive her to desperation ; and, secondly, the probability of Sir Henry’s return to pursue the game he has started. She should at once be removed.”

“ I have foreseen that, but I waited to be assured of your opinion that Jenny continues upright. My resolution is now taken. She must come at once as an under-servant to the hall ; nothing else that could be devised would go so far to restore her character in the eyes of the people as to see that I have faith in her purity. She will there be effectually sheltered from Dalzell.”

“ Excellent, Noel. Oh, that your home was as sweet a rest to you, as it is a sure refuge to all who need !”

“ It cannot be. You think I am cold, but you mistake me. The heaviest of misfortunes has fallen upon me : I love one who is already engaged to another. It is a subject on which I can hardly endure to speak, so please let it henceforth pass unnoticed.”

“Noel, Margaret and Wilhelm are going to Germany. He has friends and relations there, whom he has not seen for years. He has come to the resolution suddenly, and they will start in a day or two. I have written to ask little Kate Dawson to come and bear me company, and I hope you will be as often with me as you can.”

“That I will. Only you must make Kate understand that I am not a marrying man. I must feel secure that she will attach no meaning to any kindness I may show her.”

“You will be quite safe. Kate is just engaged.”

“All right. Now I will say ‘Good-by,’ and go back to engage Jenny as apprentice to my head housemaid.”

The day after Mr. and Mrs. Jans had started for the Continent, Noel was surprised to see a letter in a lady’s handwriting among those placed on his breakfast-table. He broke the seal and read it first; it ran thus:—

DEAR MR. ELLIOTT,—

“I AM undertaking a task of extreme delicacy and anxiety in thus addressing you, but

with anything so sacred as a sister's happiness at stake, I will not let mere conventional rules keep me silent. You cannot fail to have seen that my sister Emma loves you. She believes that you also love her, and all her hopes of happiness are centred in that fact. But your neglect of her is breaking her heart. She tries in vain to see you; and, spirit-weary, she is unable to eat or to sleep. She walks every evening in the shady avenue near the beech wood; I implore you not to delay giving her the meeting, and reassuring her as to her place in your heart, which I cannot doubt for a moment, knowing your high and upright character, and that you would not for an hour have encouraged hopes which you did not intend to realize.

“ Very truly yours,

“ SOPHY HAMMERLYE.”

Noel Elliott sat as if thunder-struck. What a gulf had suddenly opened at his feet! He covered his face with his hands, and sat motionless, until the cold nose of his dog laid against his hand startled him into every-day life again. He patted

him kindly, and bid him lie down. Then he rose, and began slowly pacing the room.

“How we deceive ourselves!” he exclaimed. “Blind, blind, tenfold blind that we are! I have longed for a companion and friend, both of these, and all else in a wife! I have longed to be able to make the happiness of another, yearned even for a fair occasion of self-sacrifice, and lo, it was all mere idolatry of one being! I thought I was devoting myself to God, and good, and I was only worshipping Joanna!”

He covered his face again, and stood dismayed at the insight he had got into his own heart.

“But she is lost to me!” he continued. “There was no mistaking her manner, nor that of Dalzell, the other day! Alas, alas! that he should be so little worthy of it. I could give her up far more easily if he were a better man . . . But could I do so really? Perhaps I am deceiving myself again—I cannot define my feelings—my reasoning powers are wholly at fault!”

Again he paced the room.

“I shall do the best to marry this girl,” he said.

"Thus, at any rate, I can secure the happiness of one, and practise to some extent my own resolve of self-sacrifice. At least, it will secure her happiness if she loves me—but does she love me? I could not—oh, I could not marry her otherwise. I dread beyond anything a heartless marriage. Her sister looks false, I could not trust her; but there seems to be much more good in Emma—I think she would not say she loved if she did not. I will see her."

For a time he seemed relieved by his resolution, but soon a new fear disturbed him.

"Can I tell her that I love—can I act as if I did so without being false internally and externally? I dread a heartless marriage as a curse. Am I not bringing one upon her, while believing that I am blessing her supremely?"

He thought long and anxiously on this point, and finally took his hat, and turned his steps towards Sylvester.

"This is a question for woman's wit; I will consult with aunt Bertha," he said.

But his aunt took quite a different view of the matter.

“It is the most audacious piece of intrigue I have ever met with,” she said, “and you must on no account meet her. Depend upon it, she will involve you in some plot. You will be seen together, and your names will be coupled, and then you will feel your honour at stake. We will give the girl the benefit of the doubt, and suppose her honestly in love: if she has the least prudence, she cannot be seriously so, and it will be but slight suffering to be undeceived at this stage. If the elder sister is not an adept at intrigue, and utterly devoid of principle, her countenance belies her; I would keep no terms with her.”

“I agree with much that you say, but I don’t see how the poor girl can be undeceived as to my intentions regarding her, without either an interview, or such a letter as must betray to her the step which her sister has taken. I would willingly avoid either, were it possible, but I would rather run the risk of compromising myself by seeing her alone, than subject her to the pain of knowing that her sister had revealed her secret.”

"Hear the plan I have to propose, Noel. I will drive along the road, descend at the avenue, and wander up and down, as if seeking wild-flowers and insects. If Miss Emma is there, I will enter into conversation with her, introduce the subject of your prospects, natural enough to a garrulous old aunt, and tell her that your heart is pre-occupied."

"Be very careful not to say by whom—I should be terribly grieved to arouse Dalzell's jealousy, and so plant a thorn in that sweet girl's pillow."

"Dear Noel, I cannot take your view of Joanna's being engaged to Sir Henry. I feel sure she would have told Lady Mary, and also Mr. Jans, and Margaret; and Lady Mary says he has scarcely ever been at Fairlawn of late."

"Seeing is believing, aunt Bertha. I *know* that she loves him."

Good-kind aunt Bertha departed on her benevolent mission. She little guessed that Dalzell and Sophy Hammerlye were watching from a leafy covert near, nor that at sight of her they

rocked to and fro with suppressed laughter, and whispered,—“The good boy sends auntie to see if the niece elect looks *good*, and if so, to propose in his name.”

Miss Elliott found her mission difficult enough, without the embarrassment of such knowledge. She pursued her course unflinchingly—it came naturally to turn the conversation to Noel, but was very difficult to persuade the lady that his heart was really and hopelessly given to another. But when conviction at last dawned on her, she looked more angry than sorry, and betrayed actual triumph when the fall of some heavy drops heralded an approaching storm.

“It is beginning to rain, I would advise you to go home at once. You are in for a drenching in any case.”

These were her last words to aunt Bertha.

Dalzell, Sophy, and Emma sat in the snug library at the Manor House until midnight. Their fury knew no bounds, and they lost sight of the hope of securing a good *parti* in their thirst after vengeance, which should crush at

once the inoffensive Joanna, and her nobly devoted friend. What plans they adopted in that unholy midnight counsel, we must wait to develop in a future chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

There Envy, sorry fiend that aye doth dog
The path of all that are or good or great,
Was borne along, a prosperous demagogue,
On ruffian shoulders, through the ruin'd gate
Of a mob-plunder'd palace; at his side
Did Slander sneak, and brazen Falsehood stride;
He waved a patriot's banner, and he wore
An oak-leaved chaplet begrimed with gore.

Preciosa, by CALVERT.

“DID my aunt say how soon she expected to be able to return, Miss Dawson?” asked Noel Elliott, as he entered the drawing-room at Sylvester in haste, just as the first drops of a thunder-storm fell on the thirsty foliage of the shrubs near the window. “She went out on a kind embassy from me, and she is too frail to face such a storm as is approaching.”

“Miss Elliott did not say when she should

come back, Mr. Elliott. There comes the lightning! Oh, how frightened I am!"

Elliott looked impatient, and rang the bell violently; the housemaid presented herself, looking scared.

"Bring me the largest umbrella you have, and Miss Elliott's plaid; also a waterproof cloak, if there is such a thing in the house."

"There's Mr. Jans' village cloak, but it's a *lady's* cloak, sir."

"It shall be a gentleman's for once," he said, as he threw it over his shoulders, and rolling the plaid into a small tight parcel, placed it under his arm.

"Oh," exclaimed Kate, looking up, "you surely are not going to venture out!"

"I surely am not going to leave my poor aunt to the tender mercies of a driver of fourteen years old, in such a storm as this, Miss Kate! Here, Susan, come to Miss Dawson, and stay with her, or take her down into the cellar; your very small mutual amount of nerve will go the farthest there."

He stepped forth into the darkness, taking the

road towards Overstone, and walked on rapidly. When he had proceeded a couple of miles he met the pony galloping at full speed, and dragging the bruised and broken carriage along with it. He hastened forward, but ere he had gone far, he espied a black object in the road. This proved to be Tom, who, though considerably bruised, had no serious hurt, and was engaged in solacing himself by a good cry. Aunt Bertha lay under the hedge near ; she was quite herself, and assured Noel she was not materially hurt, only shaken, and the breath beaten out of her. He raised her tenderly, thankful to find she could stand—all her limbs were safe, but she was drenched to the skin.

“Can you walk home? or shall I run to the Cray and get a carriage?”

“No, no, dear Noel, let me walk, or crawl, rather than get into a carriage again ; it has been shock enough to be thrown out once ! I don’t think I shall ever feel at ease with a horse again.”

He wrapped the plaid around her, and supported her carefully. She had but small walking powers

at best, and the weight of her saturated clothes trammelled her. Noel took her in his arms, and carried her along, calling to Tom to follow. Thus they arrived at Sylvester.

The worst of the storm was over, and Susan and Kate were again available. They assisted Miss Elliott to bed; at her nephew's suggestion they administered a strong dose of brandy, and Noel Elliott returned home at midnight, satisfied with his aunt's account, and greatly relieved to find it not incumbent upon him either to break a woman's heart, or to sacrifice himself by a distasteful marriage.

Very early on the succeeding morning he was roused by a message from Kate,—

“Please, sir, Miss Dawson has sent to say that Miss Elliott is in a raging fever, and quite out of her head, and she's feared to stop alone with her.”

“Follow me to Sylvester,” he said to his valet, “I shall want you to carry a message,” and he made the hastiest of toilets, and walked rapidly across the fields, and through the very wood where poor old Vansettle had received his grand discomfiture.

Kate met him in the garden, pale and trembling.

“ Oh, she is so ill ! ” she exclaimed ; “ she talks such nonsense, and I am quite afraid of her. Susan is afraid too. What is to be done ? ”

“ Should you mind going to Lady Mary for a few days, Kate ? Miss Wallstein has nerve for illness of any kind, and is a first-rate nurse ; but I could not ask Lady Mary to spare her unless I could provide a substitute.”

“ Oh, I will gladly go. I am grieved beyond measure to be silly and frightened, because it makes me so useless ; but I will do the work of any sensible person who will come to the aid of dear Miss Elliott.”

Noel thanked her, and hastily wrote a line to Lady Mary, preferring his request for the exchange. Kate carried that, and the valet went to summon Mr. Stanton. Noel then went to his aunt, and found her, as Kate had described, in a raging fever, and quite delirious, but with the window closed, and all the curtains drawn around the bed. He let in the air as a precursive measure, and waited the result of his appeals.

Mr. Stanton came first, cut off the lady's hair, lightened the clothing of her bed, and sent for ice: he looked round in perplexity, "Who is to take orders?" he asked.

"Give them to me, if you please," said the low sweet voice of Joanna, as she glided into the room, a picture of neatness and self-possession, and looking as if she lived there always instead of having arrived two minutes before, after running half the way from Fairlawn. All eyes brightened at the sight of her. Mr. Stanton smiled as he said, "I have no fear of the case if my best hospital nurse undertakes it;" and the invalid ceased her moaning as Joanna settled her pillow. Mr. Elliott returned home, his anxiety greatly relieved; he was rapt in deep meditation when his attention was attracted by a girl meeting him on the way, and stopping to curtsy low.

"Where are you going, Jenny?"

"To Overstone, sir: the housekeeper has sent me."

He felt half inclined to turn her back, but he feared the result of interfering with the old

woman's orders, so he bade her not linger by the way, for he should notice how long she was gone. The subject never crossed his mind again that day.

On opening his budget of letters in the morning he was surprised by the sight of a lady's hand again, but his heart bounded high as he recognised the characters of Joanna's writing; ere he had time to peruse the letter a message arrived from Sylvester, giving a very bad account of his aunt. Mr. Stanton thought so seriously of her case, that he decided at once to telegraph to Paris for his aunt Margaret and Mr. Jans. Alone and at rest, though anxious enough, he opened his letter; at sight of the first words the paper dropped from his hand,—

“Beloved and adored Noel!”

Had he seen a beast's hoof peep from under the graceful folds of one of her tasteful dresses, he would not have felt more awe-stricken than at this unmaidenly mode of address; his amazement was so great that it was long before he could continue reading, or even take up the letter. At last he compelled himself to do both.

"I am a friendless, penniless girl, and have no claim to such a gorgeous fate as that of becoming your wife, but I must either speak my love, or break my heart in silence. I get no rest night or day: Lady Mary is displeased by my mopishness: I am losing ground in every way. Oh, come to me, and let your lips press upon mine the sign of peace!—JOANNA WALLSTEIN."

"How glad I am I have sent for Margaret; she may be able to find some clue to this mystery. This letter must have been written the night before last, but if so, how could she meet me so calmly yesterday morning? She blushes at the remotest allusion to Dalzell, and her colour never rises for me. Pooh, the letter *can't* be hers—no woman could act her part so coolly! I will go down and see her, and allude to the letter, or not, as chance dictates."

Joanna met him with a look of anxiety, but his aunt's state fully accounted for that; she sauntered round the garden, looking weary enough, but she had been up all night.

"I shall get a nurse, Miss Wallstein; you will

be knocked up. You shall be overseer, but you must have subordinates to do the work."

"Please let me be the only nurse," she said, earnestly. "You cannot think how much happier I am when I have some one to look after. Remember, I am a lonely being, and to such, claims and responsibilities are rare and precious things."

Her clear eyes met his frankly as ever, as she said this, and though he fancied he could detect more of tenderness in their expression than they were used to show to him, yet they were far enough from the tone of the letter.

"She has never seen that composition," he said, to himself, "and she never shall; there is some *diablerie* abroad; I would I could find the conspirators; surely Dalzell would not lend himself to such vile arts."

In the evening he went again to see his aunt, and was relieved to find that the fever was abating.

"Sit by your mistress, Susan, and be perfectly still. I am going to take Miss Wallstein round the garden; you can throw a handkerchief out of

the window if Miss Elliott wants anything that you cannot do."

He drew Joanna with him down the stair, and out into the lawn; then he perceived that she wore very thin boots.

"Go back and put on goloshes, for the dew is falling," he said.

It was so strange to be bid to go and come, and he had such a gentle yet irresistible way of issuing his most reasonable commands; Joanna's heart bounded as she went to do his bidding, and it bounded again when, returning to the garden, she found him with a light shawl in his hands ready to wrap around her. He then placed her arm within his, and led her along the shrubbery walk.

"I trust my aunt has got a turn now," he said, "and that before Margaret returns she will be half way to convalescence."

"Have you written to Mr. Jans?"

"I telegraphed this morning. Do you approve?"

"Yes, I approve; it was the right thing to

do. Nevertheless, I am sorry that you have done it. It is such a boon to me to feel that I belong to some one, that I am greedy of my post beside Miss Elliott."

"I have fancied that you did belong to some one, Miss Wallstein. Surely Sir Henry Dalzell claims a right to you? Forgive me if I speak presumptuously."

"No, no; I am glad you have spoken. Sir Henry Dalzell and I are nothing—never can be anything to each other. He hates me now."

"Ah! I begin to see light into a great mystery. Have you any enemy besides him?"

"Oh, no! And I have not reckoned him an enemy, only one day he was very angry with me. But he had some cause, and doubtless his anger passed off as quickly as morning dew from the grass."

They came out on to the lawn as she spoke, and were just in time to see a handkerchief flutter from the window to the ground.

"There, I am wanted. Good-night, you are very kind to me, and it is sweet to be taken care of."

She was gone before he could answer. Her low-spoken words echoed to his heart—"Sweet to be taken care of," and "Sir Henry Dalzell is nothing to me." Then there was at any rate a possibility of his brightest hopes being realized! He forgot the forged letter, forgot his momentary impression that Sir Henry Dalzell was her enemy, forgot everything, but those words of blessed meaning, and the soft tones in which they were spoken.

He was still wandering in the shrubbery when Mr. Stanton passed through the garden; Mr. Elliott saw him, and waited his return. His report was satisfactory, but he found the great heat of the weather had melted the ice prepared for the invalid, and he wished to send to a nobleman's house in the neighbourhood for a fresh supply.

"Allow me to go into the drawing-room, and write a note to the house-steward at Gare Hall. I have a general permission to apply to his ice-house on behalf of my patients."

The two gentlemen entered the drawing-room

together, but on looking into the portfolio only one sheet of exquisite magenta paper was to be found. Mr. Stanton laughed at the idea of using such costly pap  terie for a doctor's order, and finally tore the sheet in half, jaggng it untidily in one corner. Two envelopes were there, a white and a majenta one, the latter bearing the crest of Jans. Noel laughed heartily, promising himself much fun in tormenting his aunt for her double weakness, in using magenta paper, and in sporting her husband's crest.

After this the squire walked slowly up the village, and turned into the garden gate at Fair-lawn. Lady Mary and her lively companion were sitting under a spreading acacia-tree, and the girl had robbed some of its snowy clusters to mingle with her own brown ringlets. She was singing gaily, and as she passed from grave to gay—from pathetic to ridiculous—Lady Mary laughed heartily; yet she looked soothed by the innocent mirth and playful frankness.

“How sorely one often misjudges people!” thought Noel. “I have at times blamed that girl

for her close companionship with Gregory Walsingham, and now I see her putting forth the same charms, and using the same merry pranks to entertain the darkened days of the neglected lady. When shall we learn to judge with righteous judgment!"

Noel sat down beside the ladies, and satisfied their anxiety about his aunt; he then addressed Kate.

"You know Sir Henry Dalzell, Miss Dawson?"

"Quite as well as I wish to do. If I were a cat my hair would stand up, and the electric sparks would crackle quite loud the moment he came into my presence."

"Have you any reason to suppose that his feelings are inimical to Miss Wallstein? I do not ask from mere curiosity. I have discovered, or think I have discovered, a plot for compromising her, and I am sure she would permit me to make every investigation."

"He persecuted her sorely at 'Granny Walsingham's Christmas.' He is a man beyond my comprehension. He seemed to be playing the

same game with Miss Wallstein and Miss Hammerlye, and I never could even guess at his meaning."

"Ah! I thought that he and Miss Wallstein fraternized by mutual attraction."

"I am certain that after that village concert Joanna never associated with him willingly. That night he monopolized her, and after his return he went on drinking, till his good manners were laid to sleep; and in that disgusting state he tried to kiss our dainty Joanna in the dark passage!"

"The blackguard! I hope she let him feel her displeasure!"

"Her voice was queenlike, but I feared for her nerve, so I let Gregory's dog out upon them, and he hunted the vermin to its hiding-place, and then she came to me. Even her grand composure was sorely shaken, but though she was sweet and affectionate to me, she did not give me her confidence. She is very reserved."

"Very!" exclaimed Lady Mary; "it is the only fault in her character, and I believe it is caused by the admixture of other people's affairs

in her experience; she is open enough in things which concern herself only. And surely, Mr. Elliott, her faithful retentiveness of others' secrets is a rare and precious quality."

She said this, eager to propitiate the squire's favour for her darling, for though her own experience effectually deterred her from all effort to be a match-maker, yet she could not help treasuring certain schemes of ambition for her favourite.

Noel smiled cordially. "A rare and a precious quality truly, Lady Mary, as are all those which adorn the character of Miss Wallstein! Now, Miss Kate, allow me to proceed with my investigation. Have you seen the handwriting of Sir Henry, or of Miss Hammerlye? The fact is, I have received an anonymous, or rather a forged letter, and I am bent on discovering the writer."

Kate reflected for a moment, and then she sprang to her feet, clapping her hands, and making her ringlets dance like laburnum blossoms when the wind sweeps over them. "I have it,"—she cried—"I have it! You know, Mr. Elliott,

that for many years back Gregory has kept a book, entitled 'Annals of Granny's Christmas.' In this he and Susan, and Janet, and Ellie, and I, insert all the poems and epigrams, and clever answers that are written at the games, and we add portraits of the company, and illustrative emblems, and make it as funny as possible. Now, Miss Hammerlye was a bad hand at ready-wit—not that she lacks cleverness, but she does not care to apply it to such poor subjects as children's games; but, at the same time, she did not like people to know what stupid things she wrote. So Susan watched her disguising her hand—she took up the epigram of one, and of another, and copied the writing, and the Walsinghams and ourselves spent an evening in ascertaining whether certain nameless and very vapid effusions belonged to any of the people whose writing they resembled. The other Miss Hammerlyes had written their stupid compositions in their own hands, so only Miss Sophy's presented variety of calligraphy. We detected similar attempts of Sir Henry's."

"Splendid! Would Gregory let me see, and, if necessary, exhibit the volume?"

"I am sure he would. He was charmed with Miss Wallstein, and felt the same inexplicable recoil from Sir Henry which I did. There are caricatures of Miss Hammerlye attached to each specimen of her writing, showing her manner when speaking to you, and that when speaking to Joanna; for I must tell you that she has imitated the writing of you two very closely, and Sir Henry has hit yours off to perfection."

"Of us two! I wonder if Miss Wallstein has received letters purporting to come from me! But no, her easy manner indicates the contrary. I will ride over to Sutton Grange in the morning, and see the illuminated missal."

Elliott carried out his purpose, and Gregory Walsingham entered with great spirit into his investigation. He allowed him to carry the "Annals" back to Elliott's Cray, and promised Sir Henry a ducking in the horsepond, if he should venture through the village of Sutton.

Aunt Bertha was better, but just as Joanna

came down to speak to the squire, Mr. Stanton arrived, and for reasons of his own remained so long, that Noel, impatient like the rest of his sex, grew weary of waiting, and leaving his adieux with the maid, returned home.

In the morning he eagerly examined his post-bag, quite hoping for a new development of the plot, but only business letters were there. They, however, required immediate attention, so he applied himself to writing before going down to Sylvester. While thus employed a note was brought to him which he opened eagerly; it was Joanna's writing.

"Your letter fills me with amazement. Come to me."

"Another forgery!" he exclaimed. "But no, it is the magenta paper, the very half sheet which Stanton jagged, and there is old Jans' crest."

He rang the bell. "Who brought this note?"

"Tom, sir, Sylvester Tom."

"Very good. Go down to Sylvester, and give my compliments to Miss Wallstein, and tell her that I have pressing business to attend to to-day,

and I shall not be able to wait on her till to-morrow."

The man retired. "I must not venture on an interview until I have ascertained the bearing of the letter that has called forth this rejoinder. I cannot doubt that it is a link in the chain. I will go over to Sutton again, and take counsel with Gregory. What letter can I be supposed to have written that would cause her 'amazement!' I wish it may be a proposal, that is, if I could know the fact, but it will spoil everything if I act on a false impression. I will go to the Overstone station, and meet every train; it will be my salvation if Margaret would only arrive to-day."

CHAPTER VII.

“IN VINO VERITAS.”

L'amante per aver quel che desia,
Senza guardar che Dio tutt' ode e vede,
Avvilluppa promesse, giuramenti,
Che tutti spargon poi per l'aria i venti.

ARIOSTO.

As soon as it was known in the servants' hall that the master was going out for the day, the kind old housekeeper proclaimed a holiday to a large proportion of the maids, that they might go and see the gay wedding that should that day take place in Overstone. Jenny, with her pretty coy manner and docile temper, was already a great favourite with the old woman, and she was to be of the wedding-party; only the housekeeper bade her keep very close to Ellen, the head housemaid, and never leave her for a minute.

The fine old church was already crowded when the new spectators arrived, but they found a friend, a tradesman, whose interest it was to conciliate the favour of the servants of the great, and he found good places for three in the gallery. Jenny being the youngest was still left unplaced, so their polite guide conducted her back to the body of the church, and, placing her behind a pillar, he whispered, “Stand still here, and you will be able to touch the bride as she passes, and get a capital view of the procession as it enters the church.”

Jenny stood obediently, her whole soul bent on the sight she was to see. She wore a clean light cotton dress, and a tippet like it, and her simple bonnet was tied with a white ribbon. Her dress was thought poor in the extreme by the other servants, each of whom had donned a silk gown and heavy shawl to do honour to the occasion, and were as flushed and overheated as they might reasonably expect to be after carrying a stone of finery for five miles on a scorching August morning. Jenny, on the other hand, was cool

in comparison, and the flush gained by exercise and excitement only added beauty to the round cheek and the long dark lashes resting upon it.

There is a rustle, a silent tension of expectation, and the great western door is thrown open. Dr. Quiller enters with the bride upon his arm, having gained the right to act as father on this occasion, by having recently rehearsed a different part in the same service, which rehearsal gave the bride's mother the privilege of calling herself Mrs. Quiller. The bride is all lace, and satin, and orange-flowers, and diamonds; the ample veil, softening off the harsh contour of her features, makes her quite beautiful, and the breath of the beholders is hushed in mute admiration. Bridesmaids follow in pairs, veiled also, but the veils leaving the countenance uncovered, rather invites than checks the gaze of the crowd. Jenny's eyes filled with tears as she looked upon the bride, and she shyly put forth a little hand to touch her, as she might have attempted to do to an angel; but when she looked up in the face of the first bridesmaid, she started and shrank closer behind the shelter of the

pillar ; she looked grand and gorgeous, but Jenny felt as if, had she seen her, she would as likely as not have trampled her under her feet.

Slowly the cloud of gauze and silk passed by, in all its dazzling whiteness, and Jenny again leant forward to catch another glimpse of the exquisite dresses ; as she did so, her one ornament, a little flat-iron cast in pure gold, hung from her neck, and attracted the notice of one among the bridal party. There was a momentary lock among the crinolines as the bridesmaids were arranging themselves behind the happy couple at the altar, and the tail of the procession came to a stand. During that moment a hand was laid on little Jenny's shoulder, and a voice whispered in her ear, " Leave the church quickly after the service, turn to the left till you come to the brook, and wait in the copse there, for I have something to tell you."

The ladies are accommodated, the remainder of the party take their places, and the solemn service commences ; but how many of the hearts there are conscious of its solemnity ?

The bride's thoughts are occupied by the

grandeur of the present scene, and the hope of many a gay occasion when her husband's ample income shall enable her to shine in full glory. The bridesmaids are each busy with a scheme of their own, as brilliant as the present, or more so, money and glitter being the gauges of their glory. Little Jenny's thoughts seem to stand still, gazing on one picture, that of a man "beautiful as an angel, and with ringlets to his chin;" and Dalzell, being a man of varied interest, now wanders in thought to the side of a beautiful and high-minded woman, poring over a false letter, from a man who has won, and won worthily, her true heart; and now pictures a hazel copse and a gurgling stream, soft shade around and dancing light before, and a lovely, unsuspecting child-woman, led blindfolded to her ruin. Both the pictures please him, and he echoes the clerk's "Amen" with pious gusto.

The clergyman's voice ceased, the marriage was at an end, and the newly united couple rose from their knees. The hush roused Jenny to consciousness, and she glided from the church while

the remainder of the beholders waited to see the procession move back again. She was frightened at the sight of the long line of carriages, each drawn by white horses, on one of which sat a post-boy in a blue jacket, and wearing a white favour; the horses had favours too, and children stood in white dresses with baskets of flowers, which they strewed in the way.

Jenny hurried on, receiving many a rough compliment from the post-boys as she passed; this made her hurry the more, and she was glad to gain the turnstile, and betake herself to the sheltered path. She heard the prancing of the horses as each carriage passed, bearing its freight of beauty and wealth; she heard the shouts of the mob as they fought and wrestled for the small coin scattered by the bridegroom; she thought ere long that she heard her own name spoken, and her heart beat louder as she glanced shyly around.

"My little Jenny," said the well-tuned voice of the baronet, "I have been hungering for a word with you. That jealous squire has hidden

you out of my sight, and I have felt quite bereaved."

The colour that went and came in the girl's face, showed the practised libertine that he had reached her heart, and in that assurance he ventured to kiss the blushing cheek, well knowing that the traitor heart could not say nay.

"And did you like the wedding, Jenny? And would you like some day to be a lady-bride, little one?" he continued.

"Oh, it was beautiful, sir,—beautiful and heavenly!"

"Would you like to wear satin, and lace, and jewels, and be counted a lady, Jenny?"

"Oh, yes, that I should! but it isn't for the like of me!"

"Jenny, I will make you a lady if you will love me!"

"Me, sir! Lor, sir, I couldn't be a lady!"

"Yes, you could, Jenny, you are very ladylike now, because you are so gentle and loving. I will make you my wife some day, and then you will be called 'my lady,' and every one will feel

honoured when you speak to them. But you must love me very much, and do exactly what I bid you, Jenny."

"Oh, yes, sir, that I will, but——"

"Well, Jenny, but what?"

"May I tell mother, sir?"

"Certainly, my dear, but not to-day. Wait till I give you leave. I will write to you, Jenny, and leave my letter at the lodge; you must implicitly obey every direction I give you. Don't tell any one I have been with you, and let no one vex you about me, for be quite sure that I will marry you before long. Now I must go away, for I pretended to have business at the barracks, and the people will suspect me if I tarry longer."

But though he said he must go, he lingered on, kissing little Jenny again and again; and then, giving her the little pitcher to add to her flat-iron, he hastened to rejoin the wedding party.

And Jenny awoke from her dream of bliss to wonder where Ellen was, and what they would all say to her. She passed through the town, but caught no glimpse of any of her companions, and

then she addressed her energies to the long walk back to Elliott's Cray. The heat was intense, and the girl grew faint; she sat down by the hedge-side, and burst into tears. But she knew crying would not help her, so she pressed on again, and reached the Cray just as the servants were sitting down to tea. The housekeeper scolded her roundly for having strayed from Ellen, and a sob struggled in Jenny's throat. She suppressed it, however, and in another moment uttered a scream, and fell fainting on the floor.

Sobs were common, tears every-day occurrences, but faints were seldom seen in the servants' hall, so all hearts were touched; Jenny became the pet of the party, and no one thought of questioning her as to where she had been.

Dalzell had long since taken his place among the guests, healths were being drunk, and the wine was circulating freely. Sophy was seated by his side, but they indulged very little in conversation at the table; their subjects of interest were not such as could be discussed in public.

The bride rises to prepare for her journey, the

party is broken up, and they now disperse to kill time in the best way they can, until the hour for dressing for the ball.

Sophy and Dalzell then saunter forth, betaking themselves to that part of the grounds which joins those of the rectory. The manor-house is to be vacated soon, for the mother of the family has already taken up her abode at the rectory, and Emma and Sophy are to follow, now that the wedding is over. The lovers find the rectory grounds more attractive than those of the manor-house on the present occasion, because more private. The rectory has been newly decorated, the garden newly trimmed, extra servants have been engaged, and there is an air of life about the old place which contrasts strangely with the dead aspect it has worn of late years.

The good people of Overstone have shaken their heads, and uttered ominous prophecies about these changes, and the still greater change in the state of their vicar, which induced the lesser changes. All the maiden ladies of the neighbourhood—those, at any rate, of a certain age, have long been

chronically in love with Dr. Quiller. All the texts he has preached on are marked in their Bibles, and they know accurately how often each of his sermons has been pressed on their attention. They as systematically speak of him as "*Dear Dr. Quiller*" as if "dear" were a second handle to his name, and conferred by as high an authority as that of the three universities. It stands to reason, therefore, that when his engagement to the widow was proclaimed, all Overstone called him weak and her designing, and a score of old maids declared, "of course, they could never enter his house again."

But in this, as in other cases, safety was found in numbers. No. 1 found her difficulties vanish when shared by nineteen more of the forsaken fair, and all the opposition gradually died away. When the secret of the eventful day was whispered, along with the information that the doctor wished the wedding to be very private, all the love of the female part of the congregation returned, and each decided, notwithstanding "*Dear Dr. Quiller's*" wish for privacy, that she, at any rate, would go

to see him married.” It caused such a run upon the drapers’ shops in the article of white kid gloves, that a telegraphic message had to be sent to London for a fresh supply by the evening mail.

And Dr. Quiller had seen Mrs. Hammerlye’s banking-book, but not until his kind heart had been fully won by the manœuvring mother. Then she ventured to tell him that they were all but ruined, that her daughters were ambitious and self-willed, and that her heart was well nigh broken by them ; but she explained their good prospects—how that Sophy was engaged to the baronet, and Emma in a fair way of winning the squire, and then the widow would have uninterrupted peace.

When ? When after sowing to the wind you reap the genial breeze, instead of the whirlwind ; when the thorn brings forth olive berries, and the thistle figs !

Dalzell and Sophy are seated on a rustic seat in the rectory grove,—

“ Have you sent the letter, Lina mia ? ” he asked.

"*The letter!* I have sent a series of letters. And I am worried to death by not knowing the effect they take! I wish you would go over and see."

"Hum! Did you hear of the accident on the rifle-ground the other day?"

"Of course I did. We are too badly off for subjects of conversation to neglect that of a death on the field of battle! Why do you ask?"

"The poor fellow met with his death by coming out to mark the hits before the bugle had given warning for safety."

"I know that. What do you mean by citing the circumstance?"

"That I should incur equal danger in putting my head into Sylvester or Elliott's Cray at present."

"Pooh! Is that all your courage! I tell you I won't go on firing, unless I can ascertain that I have a hit to score. Our last shot should have been a gold!"

"What, Elliott's letter to Joanna? Didn't we come it strong?"

"Didn't we capsicums and chili vinegar,

thickened with cayenne. If she does not write six pages of maudlin rapture, from dear auntie's sick-room, in answer to that letter, she is not half such a romantic fool as I take her for. Now, Henry, I see no further need to keep our engagement a secret; we've changed our tack with the he-fool and the she-fool in question, and are making the darlings run foul on each other; it will not now injure our plot that the world should know of our mutual relation."

"No, certainly. But, Lina, I do so shrink from all this glare and display, that I earnestly desire our wedding may be a quiet one. Let us fix, say this day week, go to church on the sly, and only let the people know what has happened after we have started for our tour."

"Well, it is a great thing to me to give up the idea of a gay wedding, but I will yield that to you, dear Henry. This day week let it be."

The reader may think that these were not the style of persons to shrink from the publicity of a crowded marriage, and the reader is quite right. But reasons stronger than either chose to produce,

existed in the minds of the so-called lovers for desiring privacy, and, strange to say, even the hidden reasons were shared in common, and the friends might have added to their mutual stock of sympathy by a full confidence. Dalzell was deeply in debt, and, his property being heavily mortgaged, he had comparatively little towards payment. Sophy, also, was deep in debt. Dr. Quiller had stipulated that all expenses incurred in Julia's wedding should be put to the account of the Miss Hammerlyes, whose individual names already stood at the head of a long list of debts wherever money or credit could purchase dress or jewellery. Thus, Dalzell wished to avoid drawing any attention to his name till he should have cleared the country, and Sophy equally desired to avert the arrival of any of those peculiar billets which can never be called *billet-doux*.

Dalzell determined to speak to Mrs. Quiller in the meantime about money matters, and if he found them less satisfactory than he expected, to shirk the wedding service altogether.

He parted from Sophy, and sauntered to the

barracks to dress for the ball. In the street he met Gregory Wolsingham.

"Ah, Wolsingham, how are you? I have not seen you since Christmas!"

"No. I came in to-day to see you married. I heard there was to be a wedding, so felt sure you were leading the fair Joanna to the altar."

"The fair Joanna is making love to the squire."

"That's false. You might as well say she made love to you."

"You are a privileged person, Mr. Wolsingham, or I should call upon you to make good your words. I tell you, Miss Wallstein has perfectly stormed Elliott—I have seen one who saw her letters."

Gregory winced at the allusion to his deformity, but he was not to be thrown off his guard.

"If your friend saw the letters he saw the postmarks. Were they posted at Irskill?"

"No; they were posted at Overstone. Miss Wallstein feared the espionage of the postmistress at Irskill, so she sent the letters here to post."

"Nonsense, she has no one here in whom she can place confidence."

"Then, I tell you she has. She sent them to *me*. I posted them *myself*."

"You! But you did not know what was in them? No; she would not tell you that—not she!"

"But she did. I knew what was in them before I posted them."

"Nonsense!"

"Fact. I'll swear it!"

Gregory stopped short, looked up into the handsome face,—

"What lots of champagne you have had, Daltzell," he said. "'In vino veritas,' I had rather have heard what you have told me than have seen you married. To think of you posting them, and of you reading them!"

"Yes, I read and I posted them."

CHAPTER VIII.

BREADTH OF LIGHT AND DEPTH OF SHADE.

Hail, Love ! the Death-defyer ! Age to age
Linking, with flowers, in the still heart of man.
Dream to the bard, and marvel to the sage,
Glory and mystery since the world began.
Shadowing the cradle, brightening at the tomb,
Soft as our joys, and solemn as our doom ! ”

BULWER LYTTON.

JOANNA WALLSTEIN moved about feeling herself surrounded by a rosy light. In her bosom lay a full declaration of love from the man whom she had ever looked upon with esteem and liking, and who had of late become the hero of all her day-dreams. Lady Mary had wondered how a fine manly fellow like the squire could fail to attract the regard of an enthusiastic girl, fully convinced that he had so failed, because Joanna never mentioned his name. Her ladyship ascribed all the

reticence of her own youthful character on such subjects to her isolated and peculiar position, not knowing that it is a generic rule of womankind to speak least of those of whom they think most; or, at any rate, such a rule, if not holding good with every class, is unfailing where civilization has established a horror of a woman venturing to own one spark of love until a full declaration on the part of the gentleman is before her.

Joanna had carried this to such an extent that she had positively deceived herself. During the time that her society had been sought, and her fancy touched, by Dalzell, there had ever been conflicting elements in all her thoughts of him. Admiration of the courteous manner, the handsome exterior, the well-turned phrases in which he advanced his surface opinions; and yet restless dissatisfaction with the springs of his actions, a painful though indefinite shrinking whenever principle was appealed to, and the weakness of his own was demonstrated.

Then came the day when she heard his words quoted by the vulgar and coarse Vansettle; she

shrank as from contact with a low nature, less horror-stricken at the surface coarseness of the doctor, than at the subtle insult conveyed in Dalzell's tone regarding her.

Her liking for him had often caused her pain, from the conflicting feelings above mentioned ; now, she stepped clear out of it ; she returned his books, and burned every line she had of his writing. Her fancy, not having been founded on reality, but on imagination, melted into thin air as soon as reason corrected the mistaken impression. But slowly and gradually, out of the ashes of the dead fancy, arose, phoenix-like, a new and deep affection. Every act and sentiment of Noel Elliott's stood out in refreshing relief, contrasted with those of Henry Dalzell. The restfulness of his chivalrous and unlover-like attentions, after the hollow empressement of Sir Henry's, the uprightness and purity of his daily life, the calm, earnest, manly tone in which he ever spoke, and the shade of sadness in his rich voice, made her delight in his society ; while the absence of conflicting feelings deceived her into a belief that

this deep regard was only platonic friendship. She was not aroused to the real state of her heart by finding Noel Elliott ever present there; her first suspicion was aroused by the baronet's threat, "You shall never marry Noel Elliott." She laughed at the moment, and went on her way thinking, "Who ever thought of such a thing?" but the threat returned to her first thing on awaking in the morning, and was the last memory cleaving to her as she sank to sleep; nay, that was not all, it came again in dreams, often mingled with nightmare horrors, leaving behind them dim forebodings, while Jean Ingelow's poem of "*Divided*" haunted her thoughts—

The beck grows wider, the hands must sever;
On either margin, our songs all done,
We move apart, while she singeth ever,
Taking the course of the stooping sun.

* * * *

Glitters the dew and shines the river,
Up comes the lily, and dries her bell;
But two are walking apart for ever,
And wave their hands for a mute farewell.

Sometimes she attempted to silence these fears by philosophical arguments—"I was not expecting

to marry him—Sir Henry's threat, even if realized, in no degree alters my position: "—but after such reasonings her head drooped, her hands lay nervelessly in her lap, the light in her eyes was quenched. Though she imagined she had never nursed such a hope, yet when she saw life without it, every golden ray tinging her future was extinguished, and the path before her looked blank, and bare, and cheerless.

Then she would try a different course of reasoning—"God will not let a bad man have power to quench my hope. I will cling close to Him, and He will deal kindly with His child." There you have reached the mainspring, Joanna; you have learned where maidenly reticence should end, spread your love before your elder Brother, the moment its presence in your heart is revealed to you: you need feel no shame in owning all to Him. In His sight there is no evil in woman loving before her love is sought. All love is of Him, and, blessed by Him, is the antidote to the poison of humanity. Look up, shrinking, trembling woman, you have full sympathy in Him; all that is most womanly, as well as all that is

most manly, is found in the Head of our race; and your true safety lies in throwing the little stream of your affection into the vast sea of His love, from whence it will issue again, enlarged and purified, a river fertilizing and refreshing all that it leaves in its course.

Thus seeking and finding daily strength, Joanna Wallstein carried the secret of her love hidden in her heart; yet her voice lost nothing of its calmness, and peace brooded on her forehead. The presence of the beloved object might stir the depths of her nature, but the surface remained unruffled.

Now, however, all need of reserve was gone. That letter, read so eagerly, although it quivered in the trembling hand, had ended all doubt. Her heaviest fear of late had been lest she should reveal her love, or by ever so slight a sign lead him to suspect it. Now the fear of that is past for ever; and she takes her pen eagerly, and writes her eloquent thoughts, triumphant in the freedom now given to them.

But even as she writes comes a strong and unaccountable impression upon her mind that all that, is best left to a personal interview. She

reflects and decides ; the written sheet is destroyed, and just then Mr. Stanton calls her downstairs. When he is gone, she takes the vagrant piece of paper in the drawing-room, folds, and writes as we have seen.

Never before had her being seemed so full. Every pulsation of her heart seemed a throb of pleasure. She sat looking into the green depths of a large linden-tree, and drinking in joy by every sense. Thus she luxuriated in her glad possession, till Noel's message came.

"Master's compliments, and he will come to Miss Wallstein as soon as possible, but he has pressing engagements for the whole day."

There was a momentary blank in her heart as she heard this, and then she laughed quietly.

"It is best so," she said, "this letter is joy enough for one day. I can need no more than to know that he loves me; and my few words have doubtless set him at rest on the point of my love. We will both be happier to-day than on any other that we have yet lived, for we already possess one another."

During the afternoon, Kate Dawson came in; she and Lady Mary had been to see the wedding, and Kate entertained Joanna with a description of it. She loved the merry little Kate, and to-day she delighted more than ever before in every kind of love. She spoke so cordially of every one, not only with the boundless forbearance which ever marked her tone, but with such positive liking, that Kate wondered at her love and her increased beauty. There was an expression in her face that had never been there before; and Kate, who carried true sensibility beneath her gay, bird-like manner, saw and recognized it. The great joy and rest filling her heart looked out from her eyes, and quivered in her smile, and Joanna's beauty was perfected.'

Kate was spell-bound. She could not leave her; she hung upon the rich notes of her voice, nestled her hand into the tender grasp that held hers so softly, gazed into the beautiful eyes, reading their depths and luxuriating in their gladness. Kate continued her narration:—

“ All the world and his wife were at the wed-

ding, and it certainly was a beautiful sight. The Hammerlyes must be amazingly rich; they seem to spare expense in nothing. I even met Gregory, but he denied having been at the wedding; he said he had come to get a clue to the anonymous letters. Nevertheless, I believe he had been to the wedding; Gregory is as curious as a woman!"

"I should think he would not tell a falsehood about it, Kate. What are the anonymous letters that you allude to?"

"Oh, don't you know! Mr. Elliott has been getting forged letters from Emma Hammerlye, and from——"

She stopped suddenly. Until that moment she had not remembered that it was Joanna's writing that had been imitated; the sight of her face, now deathly pale, reminded her of the fact.

"From me?" she said, and her voice was like a death-knell, so calm and hopeless, and what a change had passed over her whole appearance! A terrible conviction had taken possession of her, that either the letter lying in her bosom was a

forgery, or that it had been written in reply to some unmaidenly exposition purporting to come from her.

Kate hesitated to reply. Hers was too true a nature to take refuge in a subterfuge.

“ Yes, dear, from you; but he knew they were a cheat.”

Down, down, down—all the bright hopes, all the glad rejoicings, down they all crumble, as if touched by a magician’s wand. The bright vision has vanished; dust and ashes cover all; crumbling ruins, lightning-scathed trees, dark flowing streams, form now the features of the late gorgeous landscape! Joanna gazes vacantly from the window, her lips are compressed, the light fades from her eyes, her hold on Kate’s hand relaxes, and she falls fainting on the ground.

Kate was alarmed, but her womanly instinct forbade her calling assistance. She could not lift the fainting girl, but she managed to lay her straight upon the floor—the very best place where a fainting person can find herself. She darted from the room to the garden, where she saw a pan

full of water, an ornamental glass on the chimney-piece served as bucket to this well, and Kate put it to the pallid lips, but as yet they could not open. She dipped her handkerchief in the water, bathed her face and forehead, and soon saw signs of returning life. Joanna drank a little water, and then, with Kate's assistance, rose, and let her lead her to the couch.

"Can you tell me your grief, darling, or would you rather I asked no questions?" whispered the sympathetic girl.

"Please ask nothing. I cannot speak; it is too horrible!"

"You will let me stay with you?"

"No, love. You are kind and good, but I am best alone. Besides, Lady Mary should not be left. Go, dear, and if you meet—meet—Mr. Elliott," she spoke his name with the most painful effort, "tell him that I shall not be able to see him—that my message was a mistake, and meant nothing."

"Dearest Joanna, how I wish you could bear a little plain speaking. If you have received one of

these anonymous letters, and would give me a glimpse of the writing, I might be able to tell you whether it is such as Mr. Elliott has received, for I know the characters which Sir Henry Dalzell and Miss Hammerlye have practised. Indeed, you will ruin your heart's best interests by an over-fastidiousness."

"Then they must be ruined. Better that than that he should profess love to shield me from self-contempt. He is noble enough so to sacrifice himself."

"It would be no sacrifice. I have long been persuaded that he loved you."

But Joanna was too stricken to be able to lay hold on so slight a hope.

"No, no," she said, "he was only kind to me for Mr. Jans' sake, and so it seemed to you as if he liked me. Please, go, dear Kate."

Her friend left her, and Joanna returned to aunt Bertha; but what a different creature it was who returned to the one who had left the sick-room. The invalid was awake and wanted to be read to, and Joanna read and ministered to her

mechanically, a knell deeper than Dalzell's threat sounding wearily all the while through her emptied heart.

Miss Elliott was so far recovered that she did not need attendance at night now, and it was sufficient that Susan slept in the dressing-room with the door open. Joanna went to her room, released now from the necessity of seeming cheerful; and wrapping her white muslin dressing-gown around her, leaving her massive tresses to ripple at will over her shoulders, she cast herself upon the floor, the crushing sense of misery precluding all thought. It was very early—not yet ten o'clock—but she was greatly startled by a knock at her door; she opened it, and the cook stood in the passage.

“Mr. Elliott has called, and begs you to speak with him only for five minutes, Miss. He has been kept at Overstone all day by business, he says.”

“Tell Mr. Elliott I am preparing for rest, and cannot see him to-night.”

“Lord ha' mercy, Miss Wallstein, you've surely taken this fever from missus. You do look a terrible look!”

"I am quite well, cook, only very tired. I slept ill last night. Don't notice my looks—I am really well."

The good woman retired reluctantly, and carried the message to the squire.

"Miss Wallstein is undressing, sir, and can't see you. I wish, sir, you'd speak to Mr. Stanton as you pass by, it's my belief she's took missus's fever. You never saw what a look her eyes have got, and she is as white as my apron."

Elliott half suspected the cause of this malady, but longed in vain to remove it. If he could only learn what tone the letter had taken, he might be able to move in the matter, but a stroke in the dark might be fatal. He tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and wrote, "Take care of yourself for all our sakes. Leave all mysteries with God; He sees through them all, and will bring good in the end.—Yours, N. E."

"Take that to Miss Wallstein, and don't notice her looks—young ladies look that way at night, and are often all right in the morning."

The cook carried the note as desired. Joanna

pressed the paper to her lips and to her heart. Then she threw it from her as if stung, and lay down in bed. The pain in her head became intolerable; she rose and opened the window, the stars were shining so calm and bright, the outer world looked so tranquil and peaceful, the contrast of the external rest to the turmoil within increased her agony, and as the distant rumble of an approaching wheel fell upon her ear, she uttered a cry of anguish wrung from her by intense mental and physical pain, and threw herself upon the ground, just where Noel's pencilled scrap had fallen.

CHAPTER IX.

DARKNESS AND SUNRISE.

Apologize for atheism, not love !
For me, I do believe in love, and God.
Whoever loves him, let her not excuse
But cleanse herself, that, loving such a man,
She may not do it with such unworthy love,
He cannot stoop to take it.

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

WHEN Noel Elliott left Sylvester he did not go home. Knowing that Lady Mary's hours were generally late, he repaired to her house, professedly to tell Kate the information that Gregory had procured relative to Dalzell's boast of posting the letters, but really to learn from her any particulars concerning Joanna. Kate's account confirmed his suspicion that she had received a proposal signed with his name by post that morning, and his leading desire was to get a sight of that letter

to decide his dealing with Dalzell, and give him the key-note for his suit to Joanna.

Kate described the resolution of her friend, and the squire shook his head in dismay.

"Yes, her sensitive pride is all arrayed against me; I know not how to act."

He looked fagged and extremely worn, his step had lost its elasticity, his head drooped, fatigue and anxiety were marked in every line of his face and figure. Yet he did not take the homeward path in leaving Lady Mary's, but bent his steps towards Overstone, with the intention of meeting the midnight train.

He had lost count of time, and was proceeding wearily and at a slow pace, when he heard carriage wheels approaching; and as a vehicle drew near, he hailed the driver, the passengers in the coach recognized his voice, and bid the man stop. Noel advanced, and entered the carriage.

"Bertha is out of danger, and fast recovering," he said; "but we have sore need of you, Margaret. That demon Dalzell is playing a deep and cruel game, and we are all at a loss for one link in the

chain of evidence. We suspect that Joanna received a forged letter this morning, purporting to come from me. Her only reply to it was to call me to her; but I fear she feels she has by that one thing compromised herself, and I am certain she is suffering keenly."

"Poor child! She is with my sister?"

"Yes; and aunt Bertha is sleeping comfortably."

"Then my first duty will be with Joanna. You had better stay the night at Sylvester, Noel, and then I can communicate with you, if I come at anything worth communicating."

"I will do so; but don't own to my being here. See, I will throw myself upon the dining-room sofa, and be ready for anything that may be needed."

Mrs. Jans made her way to Joanna's room. She knocked gently, but received no answer. She opened the door, and there lay the poor girl, half covered with her beautiful hair, and quite insensible. Margaret's quick observation detected the scrap of paper lying beside her, and she took it up, and laid it on the table, before applying

restoratives to the fainting girl, lest her sensitive delicacy should be wounded by a fear that aunt Margaret had seen the estimation in which her nephew's message was held.

The application of eau-de-cologne and cold water brought back consciousness, but with it came an expression of suffering that was terrible to see. Mrs. Jans laid her on the bed ; but the feverish restlessness was too great to render it possible to stay there—she slid to the ground again, and crouched at aunt Margaret's feet, laying her head in her lap.

“That will do better,” said her friend tenderly, and she held the pretty head there, stroking the soft wavy hair, and speaking no word. This state of things continued for half an hour, during which time the patient became quite composed. Then aunt Margaret opened her mission.

“Give me the letter you received this morning, dear.”

“Oh, no, no ! No eye but my own shall ever look upon that letter !”

She spoke in an excited tone. Aunt Margaret

drew the head back into her lap, continuing to stroke the hair a little while, and she returned to the point.

“Do you believe the letter to be genuine, love?”

“Not one line of it. A cruel, cruel deception!”

“Just so. Then no breach of confidence can be violated by your giving it to me. Only the fear of paining another could justify your withholding from us what will relieve our anxiety, and direct just punishment towards the malicious writer.”

Mrs. Jans had laid hold on the right lever for influencing Joanna when she appealed to her consideration for others.

“But I cannot see how my giving up the letter will reach either of these ends.”

“No, my love. You are worn and ill to-night, and cannot judge with your usual clearness. You must be content to be a child for a while, and be guided by those whose motives of action you know to be worthy of your confidence. Give me the letter.”

The gentle tone of authority reminded Joanna

forcibly of Noel's care over her thin boots the other evening. It was none the less sweet for the association; and the requirement to yield her will to another, and that a loved and trusted one, was precious to the orphaned girl. Reaching out her hand, she took the letter off the table, and laid it in aunt Margaret's hand, then let her head sink again upon her lap.

Mrs. Jans remained quiet for some time, stroking the head that nestled to her, then she said softly—

“You are chilled, my darling; you must go to bed now, and I will bring you something warm.”

In this also Joanna obeyed, and as aunt Margaret bent to kiss her before leaving the room, she threw her arms round her neck, exclaiming—
“At all events, save me from the shame of my love being suspected by him!”

“The shame! What a distorted idea you have taken up, my child! What can associate shame with a pure affection for a true noble-hearted man? Is Noel unworthy of a woman's love?”

“Unworthy! Oh, no; anything but that. I venerate his character, but it is not that I am

ashamed of. But by my bidding him come to me he would see that I loved him, and counted on his love !”

“ And what then, darling ? ”

“ Oh, it is so horrible to draw a man on. So unmaidenly ! I can never respect myself again—never.”

“ My pet, you are weak to-night, and no wonder, after all you have suffered. But we will speak more of this another day. I know your justice of feeling too well to have any fear of your breaking the heart of a true-hearted man who has loved you so long and so honourably.”

“ Ah ! if he had loved me before all this ! But he did not. He was kind and benevolent to the friendless girl, but he professed no love until this terrible event has compromised my character. If he offers his name to me now, I shall know that he is only actuated by pity, and I cannot take his love as an alms ! ”

“ We will examine into the rights of these sentiments to-morrow, my child. You must let me lay you to rest now, for I am sadly weary

myself. We travelled all last night, and have endured terrible anxiety, seeing that the alarming telegram was several days old before it reached us. I will bring you some negus, and then you must try to sleep. I shall need you to nurse me to-morrow."

Joanna took the wine, and was full of self-reproach for never having thought of aunt Margaret's fatigue. It turned her attention from her own difficult position, which was Mrs. Jans' reason for stating her case so pathetically; and after a while sleep stole over her, taking advantage of her exhaustion.

Aunt Margaret did not retire to rest, but roused Noel from his sleep on the couch, to show him the mischievous letter. "The writing is but slightly altered from Dalzell's usual hand," he said; "this, and his admission to Walsingham, convicts him entirely. I will only wait till I see Joanna before I reckon with him!"

"Dear Noel, you are not thinking of a duel?"

"Not I, my dear aunt. A man who can forge signatures, insult the holiest feelings of a gentle-

woman, and assail the honour of a servant-maid, is not a subject for equal fight with gentleman-like weapons—whipping is his due!”

“Be careful what you are about, Noel; he is a daring man.”

“Excuse me, aunt mine, no man who uses secret slander has any courage.”

“Well, I don’t know. Only mind you keep your temper, Noel.”

“I will try to do so,” he replied, with a smile.

Joanna awoke when the day was well advanced, with every feeling like those of convalescence after brain fever. Languid and exhausted, she lay helpless and hopeless.

Aunt Margaret had peeped at her twice, and she now softly opened the door for the third time. Seeing that the girl was awake, she advanced to her side.

“Are you rested this morning, dear aunt Margaret?” was her first question.

“Somewhat rested, but still weary enough,” replied Mrs. Jans, languidly. “I should like you to rise, love, and lie on one of the sofas in the

morning room, that I may be able to lie on the other, and so attend to you with less fatigue."

"Certainly, dear aunt," replied Joanna, submissively.

"Will Susan help me to dress?"

"I will help you, love. Bertha is sleeping, and it is so dull alone that I may just as well be dressing you."

Mrs. Jans adopted this tone to impress Joanna with the idea that she herself was the one needing consideration, and that Joanna's time for being an invalid was past. She dressed the sorrowful girl with as much care and tenderness as a mother would her child, smoothing the entangled locks with such gentle patience, that the still aching head was sensible of no increased pain. She stood behind her for some minutes, pretending to hold down a vagrant tress, whilst her real motive was, that her own cool hand should still the throbbing of the pulses in her head.

When the two were seated in the morning room, aunt Margaret forgot her intention of lying on the sofa, and placed herself in an easy chair.

Joanna asked permission to sit on a low stool at her feet. When seated thus, Mrs. Jans drew her young friend's head on to her own breast, and pillowed tenderly there, she pressed her lips again and again to her brow.

"My little Joanna has not lost her self-respect for ever?" she whispered.

"Only if he suspects my love," she replied, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Or had given you his previously," suggested her friend.

"I could not believe that, aunt Margaret."

"Not if he assured you of it?"

"Hardly!"

"How often have you known Noel Elliott speak or act falsely, Joanna?"

"Never; oh, never!"

"Then where is your justice in supposing him false the first time he asserts anything you are inclined to doubt?"

"You are right, aunt Margaret. I cannot justly doubt his word. But he has not said that such was the case."

"It can only properly be said to you, love."

A long silence ensued: it was broken by a low knock at the door. "Come in," was Mrs. Jans' answer, and Noel entered.

Joanna battled strongly with the turmoil rising within, and attained a manner of some composure. The crimson blushes which had flooded cheek, brow, and neck faded away, and left her so pallid and worn-looking, that Noel's sympathy was abundantly challenged.

"You are fatigued this morning, Miss Wallstein, and I will not harass you by long discussions. Only grant me five minutes' conversation. I need that, and, indeed, I feel I have a right to claim it." The low tone was what he ever used when infusing somewhat of authority into his requests, and it harmonized with Joanna's present feelings, which, crushed and overpowered, delighted to cling to a stronger nature.

Aunt Margaret left the room, and Joanna took her chair. Noel brought one beside her.

"Miss Wallstein, what I say now, I would have said nine months ago, had I not believed

your affections to be engaged by Lieutenant Dalzell. I love you."

"Mr. Elliott, I am grateful. It is like you to be ready to shield a friendless woman even from her own contempt. But I say to you as I said to Sir Henry Dalzell, I cannot permit you to make the sacrifice."

"Joanna, a stilted tone is out of keeping with your nature, and with mine. I am a plain man, and beg you to tell me in plain words why you reject my love."

"Why do women in general reject such offers?"

"Women in general have many reasons for such a course. Joanna Wallstein will but be actuated by two."

"And what are they?"

"A doubt of the truth of the love offered, or an impossibility of returning it."

"And you would insinuate that you know the latter is not my reason. Do not be confident; the three words I wrote may be taken in many senses."

"In a great many," he replied, smiling. "Come

to me to be whipped ; come to me to be scolded ; come to me to drive away mad dogs ; come to me to chastise one who has insulted me. For whichever of these motives you called me, I am here, your loyal knight, to do your bidding."

Joanna smiled : "Come to me to be thanked," she said, but paused in what she had meant to add, for her voice trembled so, and the tears were so near.

"Thanks only, Joanna?" he asked, after a pause.

"Thanks only," she replied sadly, and with bowed head.

"Tell me for which of the two reasons you limit my reward?"

"Supposing it were for both?"

"No, no! I know you too well. You are too just to do me a wrong. One who is true cannot doubt the true."

"I do not doubt you, Mr. Elliott. I only think you have mistaken your own feelings. You have shown me great kindness, but your manner has never been lover-like."

“Look at this pocket-book, Joanna,” he said, as he drew a worn old book from his breast. “Since Christmas last, this has lain upon my heart night and day. Was that not lover-like?”

“Yes, truly,” she replied; then with a flash of her old humour, she said, “the pocket-book may well believe in your love, but that is an argument against any other attachment!”

“Exactly so, and for *this* attachment?”

“That to the pocket-book. Yes.”

“Then see the reason of my devotion to it;” and as he spoke he opened the leaves, and showed a white chrysanthemum lying between them. “I promised myself to put that away the day you became the wife of another, Joanna. Now I bring the flower to plead my faithful love as a reason why you should permit me to cherish you as tenderly.”

The tears would not longer be held back; she covered her face with her hands, but allowed him gently to possess himself of them, and to draw her aching head to rest on his shoulder. He held her thus, soothing her as the most tender of nurses, and after a while, he asked—

"Is it thanks only, Joanna?"

"It is all you ask, Mr. Elliott."

"Then it is just what I hold in my arms!"

She did not gainsay him, and his bliss was beyond the power of words to utter.

"I promised not to fatigue you, dearest," he said; "so I will go on my way. Now that you are mine to shield, to love, and to cherish, I am full of joy. God bless you."

He laid her back upon the easy chair, and went forth, and when aunt Margaret returned she had not moved hand or foot. She grudged to alter the position in which he had left her. Suddenly she remembered Mrs. Jans' weariness, and rising, begged her either to resume her own seat, or lie on the sofa.

"No, love," replied aunt Margaret, her benevolent face beaming as with her soul's sunshine; "I have seen Noel, and learned that my dearest earthly hope is accomplished, and I am weary no more."

CHAPTER X.

LYNCH LAW.

Nous pouvons conclure de là
Qu'il faut faire aux méchants guerre continuelle.
La paix est fort bonne de soi ;
J'en conviens: mais de quoi sert-elle
Avec des ennemis sans foi ?

LA FONTAINE.

As Noel Elliott rode down the avenue on his way to Sutton Court he saw a small figure emerge from the lodge, and hastily re-enter it again, when he appeared turning the corner. When the lodge-woman opened the gate for him, he asked, "Who came out of the door just now and returned, on seeing me?"

"It's only Jenny Jones, sir. She's the timidest, shame-facedest thing I ever saw. She was going to the village on an errand last night, and my master cried out sudden from behind a hedge, 'I

see you there,' and if she didn't scream out, and run, as if she'd seen a ghost!"

Noel rode forwards briskly, giving no further thought to Jenny and her fears. There was a man on horseback before him, and as he was riding slowly Elliott soon passed him; the man saluted him, and he saw that it was Dalzell's servant.

"Have you been to the house?" asked the squire.

"No, sir, only to the lodge."

Elliott's brow clouded. "On your own account, or your master's?"

The man, though not honest, was loyal, so he answered,—“On my own account, sir. The good woman there knits the grandest comforters, and I have been ordering one.”

"Look you, my man," said Elliott, sternly, "there was a different kind of comforter in the lodge just now. I don't wonder at your getting a peep at a pretty girl when you can, but, I warn you, I will have no soldiers coming after my maid-servants. These women are under my pro-

tection, and I would guard them as carefully as if they were my own daughters. I don't want to speak more harshly to you than I would to others; if it were your master, I would say just the same."

The man looked submissive, and repeated the salute, which Elliott returned, as he rode forwards.

In the meanwhile Jenny Jones returned to the servants' hall, and sought out Mrs. Dobbs, the housekeeper, asking, "Please, ma'am, may I go to mother's for an hour or two this evening; she's making me a new frock, and wants to fit it on."

"No, Jenny, not to-night. Maybe I may let you go to-morrow. I want some cherries pricked for bottling, and you must stop and help."

"Aunt's sent some gown pieces for mother and me to choose of, and father must take 'em back to Overstone to-morrow morning, ma'am. I'll work very hard at the cherries first, and maybe you'll let me go last thing?"

"It isn't seemly for young lasses to be out 'last thing,'" said Mrs. Dobbs, doubtingly; "but, to be

sure, you are a village girl, and don't encourage no followers. Well, you may work till seven o'clock, and then go down to your mother till half-past eight; but mind, if you don't be within these doors at nine o'clock this night, I'll tell master not to raise your wages for a twelvemonth."

Jenny sat down, and made herself very busy. Her little fingers moved with agility, and the heap of tormented fruit increased rapidly, while that with whole skins decreased proportionably. Mrs. Dobbs looked on in satisfaction. "She'll make a real good cook some day," she soliloquized, "and perhaps even rise to be a lady's-maid, or housekeeper!"

But Jenny was not at ease. For the first time in her life she had deliberately made up her mind to tell a lie. Her mother was not making her a dress, and there were no gown-pieces to select from; the reason of her wish to go out was contained in a little note hidden in her breast. "Meet me where I first saw you, at eight o'clock to-night, my pretty Jenny;" this was all the treasured note said.

The fruit is nearly finished, and the clock points to a quarter before seven. Mrs. Dobbs is pleased with the girl's diligence, so she bids her go and clean herself, and she will get some one else to prick the few remaining cherries. Jenny flies off to her own room, ties on her Sunday bonnet, and puts the velvet, with the pitcher and flat iron attached, into her pocket, that she may tie them on when out of reach of Mrs. Dobbs. Away she goes, all eagerness and excitement, but no longer light-hearted. She avoids her mother's cottage by crossing some fields, and in due time reaches the deep green lane.

Granny Walsingham entreated Elliott to stay with them. "There is a great meeting in Overstone, to-morrow," she said, "at which half the county will be present. Stay and sleep here, and take Greg with you to the meeting." But her guest declined the lengthened invitation, only consenting to stay dinner. The illness of the one aunt, and the recent return of the other, formed reasons sufficient for his refusal.

It is nine o'clock before he leaves the "Court,"

but the evening is clear and balmy, and there is light enough to secure the safety of the sure-footed horse. He rides slowly along, luxuriating in the joy which has that day come into his possession.

As he nears the village of Irskill, he observes two persons in the road before him, the one tall, and the other short; a nearer approach reveals that the one is a gentleman, the other a village girl. A heavy fear for little Jenny flashes upon his mind, and he puts his horse into a faster pace. The gentleman turns at the sound of the accelerated hoof-falls, and then instantly leaps the fence, and is lost to view. The girl takes to her heels. How wonderful her speed is, the horse's quick trot scarcely gains upon her, so Elliott urges him into a gallop.

"Stop, Jenny," he exclaimed; "I see you clearly, and will speak to you about your conduct to-morrow. Tell me at once who it was with you?"

Jenny burst into tears, and hiding her face, offered no reply.

"Walk beside me," said the squire, "I will not

lose sight of you till I give you into Mrs. Dobbs' charge. I am grieved with you, Jenny; you are too ignorant to know the danger of what you are doing, and too self-willed to be guided by those who would keep you from harm."

"Please, sir," sobbed Jenny, "there isn't no harm. It'll all come right soon, you'll see it will."

The poor child longed to tell her kind master that she was soon to be a real lady, but Dalzell had forbidden her to mention that.

"Silly child, right cannot come out of wrong. An act of disobedience cannot have a good result."

Jenny trembled; her poor little heart was burdened with heavier sins than disobedience, and they had hardened her conscience to all that we term light sins!

Elliott saw the girl enter by the kitchen door, and presently summoned Mrs. Dobbs to him, and bade her keep a close watch on Jenny; telling her he believed Sir Henry Dalzell was on her track.

"Then he is of that kind, after all," exclaimed

the old woman, "and I was right at the first, though they all put me down, by declaring that he was the best behaved of fine gentlemen, and was never free with any of them. But I knowed his looks—I did."

Jenny got a tremendous scolding for her indiscretion, but it never struck the good woman for a moment that the girl had gone to meet the baronet by appointment, and that all about her mother and the gowns was pure invention.

The great meeting at Overstone was to open at noon, and Noel Elliott started an hour too soon, taking with him the somewhat anomalous appendage of a huge dog-whip. He left his horse at the principal hotel, and then began slowly to pace the pavement of the market-place. He looked very pale, and there was an air of settled determination on his face, which no one guessed the meaning of, except Gregory Walsingham. Granny had spoken truly when she said half the county would attend the meeting; for it was convened to arrange for a memorial to Prince Albert, the Overstone people having only just realized that that great and

good man was lost to his country. Noblemen and squires stood conversing in knots on the causeway; farmers clustered round the entrances of the two hotels, talking eagerly of their crops, and complaining of the weather and the blight to their hearts' content. Noel was greeted by all, for he was a general favourite, but he had laid aside his usual sociability, and held converse with none; he even passed Jans with a mere nod.

Presently the gay baronet enters the square, escorting a bevy of ladies to the meeting. He accompanies them to the Town-hall, selecting for them places which command a view of the square, and then returns to converse with one and another of the loungers.

As he approaches, Elliott compresses his lips more closely, and grasps the whip-handle with a firmer hold; Dalzell offers his hand, but Elliott seizes him by the collar, and lays the dog-whip lustily across his shoulders.

"That for insulting a high-bred gentlewoman, that for forging my signature; that, and that, and that for a base attempt to seduce a maid-servant,"

he said, as the heavy blows fell on the shrinking coward in his grasp.

"Help, help! I shall be murdered!" cried Dalzell, trembling like an aspen-leaf. "Oh, good people, help!"

But no one advanced a step. The gentry gazed in wonder, for Elliott was such a "quiet fellow;" the ladies from the hall windows hid their faces in horror; only the farmers made any comment.

"Hallo, lay into him, squire! If he's been up to tricks like that he's earned a sound flogging. Lay into him, and don't be niggardly for a hit or two."

Noel did his work handsomely, and when he released his victim, he pushed him away, and then threw the whip into the gutter. "Don't pick it up," he said, in a loud voice. "It would be an insult so much as to show it to any honest dog hereafter."

"You shall answer for this!" whined Dalzell. "I'll prosecute you for assault."

"The sooner the better," replied Elliott; "your conduct will well repay examination to any who

want a moral emetic;" and he strode into the hotel, mounted his horse, and was riding slowly away, when a deafening cheer arose from the assembled crowd. He did not relax the stern expression on his face, but he lifted his hat in acknowledgment of the sympathy of his fellows; another and another followed, so that he passed on bare-headed, until he was out of the square. Dalzell was skulking away unobserved, as long as his enemy absorbed all the attention of the crowd; but when he was gone, they had time to spare for a mighty hiss, the echo of which rang in his ears for hours afterwards.

The baronet's meditations that afternoon were not of a pleasing nature. His purse empty, his character gone, his lands mortgaged—he saw but a short course between himself and a debtors' prison. Of late he had been living in lodgings, the accommodation at the barracks not being luxurious enough for his taste; he was reclining uneasily in a large arm-chair when Sophy Hammerlye entered.

"What is to be done, Henry? Have you

taken proceedings against the perpetration of that brutal assault?"

"Not yet. I am in great perplexity. I cannot go to the mess-room again until this stain be wiped out, and I cannot bear to meet the gaze of those hooting idiots in the market-place."

"You had better go away for a time."

"Yes, but——"

"I will go with you, love," she said tenderly.

"My angel!" he ejaculated, but he wished her a thousand miles off, until a bright thought flashed across his mind.

"My angel, Lina," he continued, "I am trammelled in a frightful way at present. Listen to me, dearest, and let the light of your clear understanding in upon my entangled affairs. Some months ago, before I had you to advise with, I became surety for a friend to a very large amount. He has behaved like a scoundrel, and I am now without ready money, and have been for many months. I am owing a number of small sums here, which I have not cared to liquidate by drawing from principal, and my rents will not be due

for another fortnight. If you can raise a suitable sum for present expenses, we will elope together to-night, but in that case your arrangements must be made quickly."

His professions did not deceive the intriguing Sophy for a moment, and as she went to raise the required money, she soliloquized thus:—"Humph, ruined as I suspected, but still a baronet. We must be pulled up short at an early date; it will be better to be the beggar Lady Dalzell than the beggar Miss Hammerlye."

Having come to this decision, she ordered at the principal draper's shop house and table linen to the value of 50*l.* for the Rectory. When the account was handed to her, she said quietly,—“I will not have all the goods sent home to-day. Dr. Quiller says, ‘Be so good as to give me 30*l.* in money and I will settle it with him; he has instant need of it, and the hour when the bank closes is past.’”

The tradesman bowed, and gave the money, and Sophy left the shop with the air of a duchess.

She proceeded to the Rectory, packed her

cousin's diamonds in a small box, with all her own jewellery, and the contents of her mother's purse. She also filched a few costly trifles from Emma's jewel-case, remarking, as she did so, "It will make the crash neither lighter nor heavier—when it comes they will lose all." She then packed a change of linen in a small carpet-bag, and leaving it ready to her hand, she returned to Dalzell.

He was charmed with her adroitness, and praised her greatly.

"We had better not go together," she said; "suppose I go by the seven o'clock, and you by the nine o'clock train. I will only take my ticket to Birmingham, and you will get yours through to London, which we shall reach some time during the night. We can pass on to the Continent as soon afterwards as we please."

"Excellent! What a head you have for arrangement. I will only suggest one alteration. Do you take your ticket to London, and stop short at Birmingham; take one out for me from Birmingham to London, and have it ready for me. You will find me in the night-express."

She agreed to the alteration, suspecting his reason for making it to be, that he had not money enough to pay the fare to London, in which, as usual, she was quite correct.

Her plans answered to perfection. She had a slight doubt of the baronet's exactness in keeping his tryst, but when the train stopped there he was, and the devoted lovers fled from their debts and damages at the full speed of an express-train.

Mrs. Quiller and Emma grey uneasy as the evening passed on, and Sophy did not appear; they felt sure she was with Dalzell, and became scandalized when her visit had lasted to midnight. Dr. Quiller came in from an evening party at an old maid's, where Mrs. Quiller thought it too great a bore to go. His bride told him her anxiety, and he set off to Dalzell's lodgings, earnestly hoping that he should have courage to administer a reproof while he was bringing home the vagrant.

The lodging woman deposed that Sir Henry had gone out about half-past eight, and had told her to have supper ready for him at twelve; but

she said he was very uncertain, and often stayed out great part of the night. Miss Hammerlye had not been there since half-past six.

The doctor waited patiently till one o'clock, and then returned home with his blank intelligence. Mrs. Quiller and Emma were very much perplexed, and the latter went to examine her sister's room. She came back in terror; all Sophy's trinkets were gone, and the best of her own, and little Charlotte's, and "cousin's diamonds."

Mrs. Quiller was shocked, and her nerves were not soothed by ascertaining her own losses. Nothing, however, could be done till morning, so they all retired to rest.

The doctor was bustling to the railway station in good earnest at an early hour, and there he learned that Miss Hammerlye had gone to London by the seven o'clock train, and that Sir Henry had started two hours later. The doctor saw it all quite clearly now, and, taking out a ticket for himself, he also bustled off to London.

But when he arrived there at midday he could learn nothing; he had nothing to aid the search,

neither wit nor money. The traffic of the last twelve hours had washed away all traces of the fugitives, and the mild doctor drove off to Furnival's Inn, having heard other clergymen say that they went there when in London, and consulted with the waiter about the chances of overtaking the pair. The waiter opined that if they left B—— at nine o'clock P.M., they would reach London at three o'clock A.M., would go on to Dover by the five o'clock train to meet the first steamer, and would be in France ere this. So the good man felt that he had had first-rate counsel, and that the waiter's opinion was quite as valuable as that of a Q.C., in which he might be right or he might be wrong. He stayed all night, and then returned home, to find a modest request from the tradesman for the 30*l.* he had advanced for him last night. The poor doctor *almost* regretted he had ever seen Mrs. Hammerlye.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRISIS.

Weh dir, verrüchter Mörder ! du Fluch des Säugerthums
Umsonst sey all dein Ringen nach Kräuzen blutg'en Ruhms,
Dein Name sey vergessen, in ew'ge Nacht gelaucht,
Sey, wie ein letztes Röcheln, in leere Luft verkaucht.

UHLAND.

WHILE Sophy Hammerlye and Dalzell were steaming across from Dover to Calais, or proceeding onwards by train, the news of their elopement was spreading like wildfire in the neighbourhood of Overstone. The tradespeople were frantic; for both the interesting refugees were in debt on every side, and Dr. Quiller was besieged by entreaties to pay all that had been got in Miss Hammerlye's name. He claimed time to decide. He must see all the accounts, and cal-

culate how much his income would afford. When all were gathered together, the sight of the amount appalled him; even to his unsuspecting mind it was patent that the dishonesty of the family had been deliberate; and, fairly roused, he reproached his wife bitterly for dragging him into the toils. The greatest part of the debts had been incurred before his marriage, and these he at once repudiated, promising to pay the rest by annual instalments.

The news reached London, and brought cousin Charlotte down to claim her diamonds and the heavy sums due at Gunter's, and to the jeweller and milliner. Mrs. Quiller took to her bed, and kept her youngest daughter beside her, sending Emma to bear the brunt of the well-deserved fury which was sure to be outpoured.

A new power seemed to arise in Emma in these troublous times. She forgot to lisp, and seemed possessed by a kind of dogged resolution, which made her shrink from no humiliation.

"I am outraged by your sister's conduct!" exclaimed cousin Charlotte; "I demand my dia-

monds on the spot; and also a cheque for the various sums the particulars of which I have here drawn out."

"Sophy has taken your diamonds with her, and all the jewels of value that we any of us possessed. We are deeply in debt, and have no money whatever."

"Then I am robbed!" shrieked the lady; "deliberately robbed! The wretch must have known the state of affairs before she applied to me, and made me a cat's-paw to minister to her dishonest extravagance! I will prosecute her with the utmost rigour of the law!"

"You would be justified by so doing, and it could hardly increase our degradation. But the maledictions of Overstone will not soil your name in London, which a legal procedure could not fail to do."

"She knew that, the serpent! She has ruined me. I am responsible for these debts, and when I have sold out for the amount necessary, my income will be reduced by half! She is a tenfold cheat!"

“Sink the rest of the principal; that will raise your income to its present extent again.”

Cousin Charlotte looked at her searchingly; she sneered contemptuously. “Ah,” she said, “I suppose you feel pretty sure that I shall disinherit all of you, so you make me free to spend my money myself?”

“My life stands still in the present,” said Emma, with a look of blank despair. “I feel as if there were no future. All our possessions are seized, the furniture of the Manor House is put up to auction, our character is gone. No wonder, then, that hope, fear, and grief are gone too, and no feeling but dull shame is left us!”

Her cousin looked puzzled; but she atoned to herself for her misplaced credulity by an equally misplaced incredulity. “Don’t think to impose on me!” she replied fiercely. “I see through all your tricks!”

The news reached Paris, where Penrose and Julia were spending their honeymoon. The weak, good-natured man looked appalled.

“I say, Ju, what a double-distilled blackguard

Dalzell is! We must find him out, and see that he marries Sophy. It is a deuced sell that she has made such a smash of it. I must sell out, or exchange; I can never show my face in Overstone again."

Julia went through a little ceremonial grief; but in a family where worldliness was the prevailing spirit, very little real affection could be fostered, and the young wife thanked her stars that she had made her hay while the sun shone, and was now in the enjoyment of a handsome income.

Penrose, with all his weakness, showed himself a true Briton on this trying occasion. He went at once to the police, and by their aid traced Dalzell and Sophy to the railway station, ascertaining that they had taken tickets to Cologne. Thither the good-hearted young fellow pursued them.

The news reached Elliott's Cray as the servants were sitting at their tea.

"Lord ha' mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs, when she had delivered the announcement, "to think of such a blackguard sitting at table with our master!"

Mrs. Dobbs had left her own snug tea to be the proclaimer of the startling news, having in a strong degree the keen appetite for giving a shock which so often prevails in her class.

Exclamations of all kinds resounded from the assembled group to the full satisfaction of the excited housekeeper; but her enjoyment was cut short by little Jenny dropping heavily on the ground. Then, but not till then, the good woman remembered her master's warning about Jenny, and blamed herself for having told her the news so abruptly.

They lifted the poor child, and carried her to bed, administering mint-water and smelling-salts; then they brought her some tempting supper—a piece of cold chicken, with ham and potato—and prayed her to eat.

The poor girl took no notice of their entreaties. She did not sob, or cry, or wring her hands, but lay motionless, as if stunned. They continued to press the supper, and she only answered wearily, “Not yet.”

“Leave it beside her,” said Mrs. Dobbs, in a

loud whisper. "Folks will often take things when they are not watched, when they won't touch them at your bidding. Come away, Ellen, and leave it beside her."

Now that Mr. and Mrs. Jans were at home, there was no need for Joanna to continue at Sylvester, so she gladly returned to Lady Mary. The kind creature grieved to see her looking so ill, but the happy expression in her face reassured her, and when her ladyship heard all her story, her face beamed with pleasure too.

The gardener returned from the Overstone market, and related the scene of the castigation of Sir Henry. Lady Mary was delighted.

"Served him right," she said: "if all such heartless triflers met with a similar treatment it would teach young England to mind its manners."

Joanna was proud of her lover's daring—proud of the sympathy shown him; but she trembled lest his anger might have exceeded the bounds of temperance, or lest the just punishment should prove a real injury.

Mr. Elliott allayed her fears, assuring her that

the bodily injury was less than that endured unflinchingly at frequent intervals by nine out of every ten schoolboys, and that if the circumstance did call attention to his course of conduct, it was merely what must happen, sooner or later.

The next day the great news reached Fairlawn, on its way to Elliott's Cray, and was carried by merry Kate to the squire and Joanna, as they sat chatting under the large acacia-tree on the lawn.

"Only to think, Joanna, Sir Henry Dalzell has eloped with Sophy Hammerlye, she taking borrowed jewellery and stolen goods of great value with her. Dr. Quiller is half ruined by the debts which he is morally accountable for; but there is scarcely a tradesman in the town who does not suffer by the Hammerlye's insolvency. Such bills for dress and jewellery! The postman says it makes his hair stand on end to listen to the account."

Joanna was very pale, and Elliott replied with a few words of regret. Kate thought they were far less interested than they ought to have been, and returned to Lady Mary, to deprecate their indifference.

"My darling, what an escape you have had!" exclaimed Elliott, when they were alone again, taking her hand, and placing it between both his own.

"Thank God for it!" she replied, solemnly; and as she lifted her beautiful eyes to his he saw they were suffused with tears.

"Do you pity him or her?" he asked.

"Both," she replied, sadly. "I know him to be devoid of principle, and I fear she is not better endowed. What terrible ruin is before them! Yet, Noel, I fancy that some heart underlies Miss Hammerlye's worldliness, some power of affection is latent in her nature. He, I believe, is utterly without natural affection. The time must come for her to suffer."

"As far as I can judge, they are alike worthless, and I am well content that they do not spoil two couples. They have each done their worst!"

He started as a thought of anxiety crossed his mind, and then added,—

"I, too, know most of him; and I believe his selfish immorality to have been a walking pesti-

lence, spreading destruction wherever its noxious presence came. He made a great favourite of a little girl in the village, and his patronage brought public censure upon her. I took her into my household, to shield her fame; but he eluded my vigilance, and tempted the child out to stolen interviews. I don't know how far he had gained upon her affection; but from my knowledge of the man, I fear the worst. However, the evil will be stopped now; and we must be careful not to let poor Jenny feel crushed by his fall. Would you mind walking home with me, and breaking the matter to the girl? You would know better how to convince her of the necessity of forgetting the scoundrel than I should; and if she is in grief, you will be powerful to soothe her. I know my own Joanna will not feel her consoling powers wasted on a servant-girl."

"God forbid!" she replied, earnestly. "Jenny is surely the name of Lady Mary's gardener's daughter—Jenny Jones?"

"The same."

"I know the girl well, and have often drawn

her to me. She is very open to kindness and sympathy, and has a natural refinement about her which would greatly increase the danger of any snares a cultivated man would throw in her way. I shall be more delighted than I can tell you to befriend the child."

"Come, then. We need not go to inform Lady Mary; we need not be absent more than an hour; and she will only imagine we have strolled into the wood."

When they reached Elliott's Cray, Mr. Elliott summoned the housekeeper to his presence.

"Has the news of Sir Henry Dalzell's flight reached you, Mrs. Dobbs?"

"Yes, sir; and——" She was going to give scope to her loquacity, but the stern expression in her master's face shortened her period, and induced her to confine her remarks to the simple answering of his questions.

"And how did Jenny take it?"

"Oh, sir, she fainted dead off, and looked like a corpse. We carried her to bed, and she took a sup o' mint-water, and then we tried to per-

suade her to take some supper, for she hadn't swallowed a bite at tea."

"Well, did she take it?"

"Not while we stopped, but we left it beside her; for I've often known folks who wouldn't so much as look at food when one was begging and praying them to take it, would eat it quite kindly when left to themselves."

"Did she sob, and scream, and make a great noise?"

"Bless you, no, sir! Never a whimper. She lay as still as if one had knocked her senses out. When we had put ourselves a deal about to get her to eat, she took no notice for a long time, and then she said—'Not yet.' She spoke as quiet, sir, as the lady might do—'not yet,' she said."

"Be so kind as to go up and see her, Dobbs. Tell her Miss Wallstein has come from Lady Mary's and wants to speak to her about something, and she will do her the honour to go upstairs to her as she is poorly."

"Say I have a new knitting pattern to teach her," rejoined Joanna; "it will be well not to let

her think we see any unusual interest in her position."

Mrs. Dobbs curtsied, and retired to execute her mission, greatly delighted with the peep thus got at her future mistress. "She'll do," soliloquized the kind old woman; "she speaks in as pretty a voice to a servant as to the master, while most ladies shouts to us as if they thought ears were made different for working folks and quality. And it's a good sign when a lady thinks on to save the feelings of a poor lass like Jenny. Lord, but folks don't consider what a great temptation to a country girl it is, when a grand gentleman speaks smooth and perlite to her, instead of saying, 'Here, girl, do this,' or 'Take that out o' the way, lass,' a deal rougher than they speak to their dogs."

Dobbs continued her soliloquy till she reached Jenny's door and turned the handle. It did not yield to her hand, and she brought her knee to bear upon it, supposing the paint had stuck, but the door remained shut; it was evidently locked.

The housekeeper knocked, and as the inmate

still delayed to open, she applied her mouth to the keyhole.

“Jenny, wench, open the door; quick! it’s me, Mrs. Dobbs, and it isn’t respectful to keep me standing at the door.”

No answer.

“Get up and open the door this minute, Jenny. I wonder you aren’t ashamed to behave so vulgar. You are forgetting how to treat your betters.”

Still no answer nor even the faintest sound.

“The lass is asleep!” exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs; and, her impatience getting the better of her good temper, she kicked, pushed, knocked, and screamed, in which musical exercises she was assisted by two or three of the maids, who happened to be within hearing of her *réveillé*.

Still no answer. Perfect silence within the room. Mrs. Dobbs turned pale.

“Wait here while I go and tell the master, and if you hear her yawn or snore, knock again and wake her. You, Bessie, run to Tom in the stable-yard, and tell him to throw sand up at the winder.”

Bessie departed on her errand, and the rest waited at their post, now listening breathlessly at the keyhole, and now knocking, or talking all together of their fears about Jenny till they came to the unanimous conviction that she had fainted again, and died for want of mint-water.

"Folks never come round from fits without mint-water; and, as she couldn't get it for herself, she can't come out of it; but, oh, why did she lock the door?"

Mrs. Dobbs made her way to the library.

"Please, sir, she's locked the door, and we can't make her hear."

Elliott looked at Joanna; his eyes said plainly, "What do you think of this? Is it of consequence or not?"

"In the state you described Jenny to be in when you left her, it was most undesirable that she should be locked in her room alone, or, indeed, left alone at all. Even at the risk of alarming her, I think the door should be forced open."

"Johnson is a first-rate hand at picking locks, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs; "shall I call him?"

“By all means,” he replied; and added, in a low voice, to Joanna, “that is not a very great recommendation to a footman!”

“Dear Noel, I see you have not taken an alarm; I feel terribly anxious about this girl!”

He started.

“Do you, indeed?” he said. “Don’t you think she is asleep?”

“I have a terrible fear. Do let us go up to her door.”

Johnston could not pick the lock, for the key was in, but he succeeded at last in prising back the spring. The women would have rushed in, but the master laid his hand on the door.

“Miss Wallstein, be so good as to go into the room opposite; you women follow Miss Wallstein. Johnson, you can remain in the passage, and be ready if I call.”

His calm voice and tone of authority produced instant obedience; he entered the room alone, and locked the door behind him. How glad he was that he had taken such a precaution!

Upon the table lay the plate of ham and chicken,

a fork beside it, but the knife—it lay on the coverlet! while, stretched across the bed, the clothes drawn partly over her, was poor Jenny, pallid and apparently lifeless, with a deep, yawning gash across her plump, fair throat, from whence the blood had flowed over pillow and sheets and night-dress, and had cemented into one mass the little crochet edging round her throat, and a narrow velvet securing a flat-iron and a tiny pitcher.

Noel Elliott groaned. Then speaking to the footman through a narrow opening in the door, he said,—

“Fetch Mr. Stanton directly. The girl has fainted, and it is a dangerous kind of fit. I see a horse saddled in the yard, take it, and gallop all the way.”

Mrs. Dobbs, hearing this, rushed forward with the mint-water.

“Please to let me in, sir; there’s nought so reviving as mint.”

“No, my good Dobbs, I will come out to speak to you.”

He came into the room where Joanna was, and addressed his servants.

You can all go about your work now," he said ; "Jenny wants nothing except what Miss Wallstein will be able to do. I ask her assistance because Mr. Stanton says she is better than any hospital nurse. We may need you presently, good Mrs. Dobbs, and I will then call you." He added this sentence on seeing that the old woman looked hurt.

When they were gone, he turned to Joanna.

"My fears were true?" she said.

"Terribly true. Are you afraid to see her?"

"How has she done it?"

He drew his finger across his throat. She shuddered.

"Is it past hope?"

"I trust not. I have sent for Stanton. She has fainted, and the blood has ceased to flow. I dare not recall her to life, fearing the recommencement of the hæmorrhage. Dare you see her?"

"Oh, yes. Let me go to her directly."

He turned the key in the lock, and they entered that chamber of horror together.

Mr. Stanton arrived immediately. Johnson had met him at the avenue-gate, and the doctor had made him dismount and give the horse to him; so that the quarter of a mile up to the house was traversed in a few seconds. He sewed up the gash, assuring the master that both the jugular vein and the windpipe were safe, and there was every hope of recovery.

Mr. Elliott would fain have saved Jenny the disgrace of her own act, and all the inferences which would inevitably be drawn from it; but this was not altogether possible. Mrs. Dobbs was taken entirely into confidence; and Mr. Stanton told her to speak of the blister on the throat as a new remedy for severe faintings. Thus she would be unsuspected for a time; and they must arrange plans for her going to a distance from Irskill whenever she should be fit for a new place.

CHAPTER XII.

REST FOR THE WEARY.

Like a cloud big with a May shower,
My soul weeps healing rain
On thee, thou wither'd flower ;
It breathes mute music on thy rest,
Its odour calms thy brain,
Its light within thy gloomy breast
Speaks like a second youth again !

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

EARLY the following day Joanna repaired to the gardener's cottage, whither poor Jenny had been removed. The little bed in which she lay was clean, and its curtains were of snowy whiteness, while crimson roses and white jasmine peeped in at the low window. The sick girl's cheek was as white as her counterpane ; but it was not that that struck the visitor on entering, but the hopeless expression that looked out despairingly from the once mirthful eyes.

Joanna sat down beside her.

“Are you feeling better this morning, Jenny?” she asked, softly, taking her hand.

“Oh, Miss Wallstein, it is not fit for you to come to me,” she whispered, the pain in her throat preventing her from speaking aloud. “I have been a bad girl, and broken my mother’s heart. Oh, why may I not die! there is no place for me on earth—rich and poor turn from me alike. Oh that I were dead!”

“My child, why has all this misery come since yesterday? They say you were gay as a lark till you heard of Sir Henry Dalzell’s elopement?”

“Yes, surely. Till then, I thought that they would all honour me, and envy me. I thought how fine mother would feel with a *lady* for her daughter, and that what folks call so wicked now, they would say nothing about when I was married to a grand gentleman.”

“My poor little Jenny! Then he promised you marriage?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t have kept company with him if he hadn’t. You don’t think I did it

for the flat-iron and the pitcher, though they were real goold?"

"No, Jenny; still I thought you let him come after you because he was handsome and had a winning tongue."

"Well, ma'am, so I did, partly; but I wouldn't have been at his beck so, if he hadn't said he would make a lady of me, and I should ride in a carriage, and give mother a silk gown, and send Rose to school. Everybody thinks I was wicked now. Was it wicked to want to make everybody happy?"

"That part of it was not wicked: no; but I will tell you what was the wicked part"—the girl shuddered, and hid her face in her hands,—“It was wicked to go with him when you knew your mother would have forbidden it. It was very wicked to tell a lie to Mrs. Dobbs, and to disobey her. We can't get good things—*really* good things—for those we love, by doing bad things ourselves: they may *look* good, but it is only outside show. To love God as our Father, and Jesus as our Saviour and King; and do just what He bids us, is to be good. Then He will give all kinds of really

good things to those we love, if we ask Him for them. But it is the devil who tries to bribe us with riches and glory to do bad things, and then his wages turn out all misery and temptation, and we go from one disappointment to another."

Tears were escaping through the fingers which covered the poor girl's face. She continued silent, and Joanna let her remain so, occupying herself in arranging some roses in a saucer on the table. At last Jenny whispered,—

"God doesn't hear me when I pray now."

"Why not, dear?"

"Doesn't the Bible say that if we sin when we know better we are never forgiven?"

"God forbid, my dear Jenny. God forgives *everything* that we are really sorry for, and are determined never to do again. If Sir Henry should return, you wouldn't disobey your mother by going out with him, or in any other way let him persuade you to do what is wrong?"

"Not now that he is married; oh, no!"

"Not unless you were persuaded he would marry you?"

“ Yes. But there is no hope of that? He is married, is he not? ”

“ He will be soon. But we don’t know whether it has taken place yet.”

“ Then the lady is as bad as me! But he will marry her soon. He said he would take me away to a fine place, and then he would step into a church, and ask the parson to marry us, and I should come out a lady. He’ll do that by her ; for all her fine relations would cry shame upon him if he forsook her, as he has done me. No one cares what comes to a poor girl.”

“ You ought not to say that, Jenny. It didn’t look like not caring when Mr. Elliott took you into his house just to prevent the neighbours speaking evil of you. He reproached Sir Henry sharply for speaking to you, before the other servants ; and in the public market at Overstone he laid a horsewhip about him for having deceived you.”

Jenny gazed with open-eyed wonder.

“ For deceiving me? ”

“ Mr. Elliott had other reasons for being angry

with Sir Henry, and he told him them all before all the crowd in the square. He struck him there, because he felt his conduct had been so cruel, and wicked, and cowardly, that he deserved public disgrace. All the crowd cheered Mr. Elliott and hissed Sir Henry, crying out that he deserved more than he had got."

" Whipped in the market! and he so great, and beautiful, and grand! Whipped! I don't know what to think."

The girl looked so weary and ill, and her poor brain seemed so perplexed, that Joanna felt it was better to leave her.

" Think of nothing, Jenny, except that our Father forgives all sin, and our Saviour pities all sorrow."

In the evening Joanna looked in again, but she found the invalid restless and feverish, tossing about wearily, and often speaking as if in delirium. She sat quietly by her, attempting no conversation, but soothing her pain by holding her cool hand on her aching brow, and calming the feverish restlessness by her quieting presence. She

found the mornings must be the time for talk, and the evenings for physical ministrations.

The gash in the throat progressed satisfactorily towards a cure, but the patient did not regain strength, and the low fever seemed more and more fixed in her system. Each night her mind wandered, and the delirium was unquestionable; yet she seemed to have the strange faculty of remembering what was said by others when she was raving.

Old Dame Hobson came in one evening as she was at her worst state of fever, singing scraps of songs and hymns, and chattering of her looked-for grandeur.

“Come let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne.

Stand out of my way, I am a real lady; here's my carriage and my two horses, and I've been buying a silk gown for mother. Listen! that's Rose—our Rose playing the piano, and Bobby's learning Latin. See, I have got a bracelet on my arm, and a ring on my finger. A ring! my ring! oh, where? I can't find it! He put it on in that

great church, where there were thousands of people—I believe they were Roman Catholics. Oh, see, it's all afire! How it blazes! Mother, mother! the heat has melted my ring, and my flat-iron, and my pitcher; I'm all of a blaze, and he—oh, where is he? Oh, save him, save him, and never mind me!”

“She's stark mad!” exclaimed the stern dame; “put her on a strait-waistcoat.”

“You get out!” shrieked Jenny, for her throat was better now; “throw a can o' water over her, father, for she's all afire!”

The woman rushed away in horror, and was careful not to set foot in Jones's cottage again so late in the evening.

One day when Joanna was visiting a poor woman in a cottage on the Overstone road, she was assailed with inquiries for the poor servant-girl who was taken ill at Elliott's Cray because of Sir Henry's desertion. Joanna was sorry to find that the circumstance was so well-known, and expressed her feeling to the sick woman.

“Oh, ma'am, there was a many that had an eye

on that grand gentleman. He behaved very bad indeed to the daughter of a friend of mine, and always told her as how Jenny Jones couldn't bear to lose sight of him. He said she was always after him, and he couldn't move out for fear of her catching him."

"That was very untrue. Poor Jenny never sought him. I believe every occasion of their meeting was of his seeking."

"Like enough, ma'am; but he made as though it was all on her side, just to pacify Mary Ann."

Joanna returned, half inclined to repeat this conversation to Jenny, but it must not be till to-morrow morning. The evening was closing in, and the ground was soft because of the thick carpet of fallen leaves lying in the sheltered lane. Joanna was not aware of any one being near her, when a voice exclaimed, in hollow tones, "Miss Wallstein, may I speak to you?"

Joanna started.

"Miss Hammerlye?" she exclaimed: she hoped it was not uncharitable that she could not compel herself to offer her hand.

"Emma Hammerlye!" replied the tall, dark figure, which, enveloped in a large black cloak and slouching hat, was utterly unrecognizable, "I have no claim upon you," she continued, "but I am desperate, and I must speak to some one; I have not a friend in the world, nor so much as a hope."

"I would gladly help you if I knew how, Miss Hammerlye; tell me what you would have me do."

"Give me a hope in the world, or convince me that I am a coward for fearing to leave it."

"Is the loss of income that which has robbed you of every hope, or have you sustained a heavier loss?"

"Ah, I see; you think I have lost what you have gained? No, Miss Wallstein; I only wanted Elliott's Cray as a speculation, and I never saw much hope of gaining it, so that has not caused me much suffering."

"You have a home in your stepfather's house, Miss Hammerlye."

"Home!" ejaculated the strange girl, in con-

temptuous tones; "what is a home? I have read in some book of poetry—fiction, of course—that it is 'with the loved and loving;' neither of these exist for me! My mother drives me from her, declaring I and my sister have separated between her and her husband. Dr. Quiller complains at every meal of the ruin we have brought upon him. I have left his house never to return again."

"Then what will you do?"

"I know not; I care not. I have just money to take me to London; I will go there; live by work, if I can; if not, by some other means. Some day I may have the courage I now lack to throw myself off a bridge."

Joanna laid her hand upon her arm.

"You have a little money; let me persuade you to spend that in taking a quiet lodging for a little while. You have a great talent for drawing,—very great for making caricatures—send these to some serial, and you are sure to gain bread."

"Where shall I lodge? Overstone is insupportable to me."

"There is a woman who can let two rooms in a cottage in our village. They are tidy rooms, and she only asks five shillings a week for them. Come there, and we can take further counsel on your plans. You will be clean and quiet."

Emma turned to accompany her, then stopped.

"I will wait, and follow you at a distance ; you will be ashamed to be seen with me. No one speaks to me in Overstone."

"I should have been ashamed to be seen with you before this interview," replied Joanna, "but now that I know you wish to lead an honest upright life, I respect you again. I am now glad to walk by your side."

"But," said Emma, her voice assuming a softer tone than it had hitherto done, "resolutions for the future are so vague and shadowy—past dishonour so real."

"If the past dishonour be hated, God casts it behind His back ; surely we may do the same ?"

"And does He give us credit for better intentions ?"

"He sees our hearts ; if the intentions are

honestly there, He values them far more than we do. Men are unjust and suspicious, but He never is that."

They had reached the cottage, and the good woman was all joy at the sight of a lodger. She looked rather blank when she heard the name of her guest, but a whispered word from Miss Wallstein set her mind at rest. She agreed to buy in the provisions for which Emma gave her money, and Joanna left the poor girl with more hope in her face, and more music in her voice than had been there for many a week.

She repaired to poor Jenny's bedside; the girl was weaker, and the fever as intense as ever. Mr. Stanton shook his head.

"She loses ground," he said, "and will not live to see the winter snow."

On the morrow Joanna led the conversation round to Sir Henry, in the hope that when she found he had spoken of her in ridicule, she would be able to cease her love for him. The result proved that to a certain extent her premises were correct."

“ Oh, how false, how cruel he was ! I am glad he was punished ; but I hope, oh, I hope God will forgive him ! Dear Miss Wallstein, am I very wicked to want God to forgive him, and take him to heaven when he dies ? ”

“ Certainly not, dear. You have only to be sorry for your own disobedience to God, and to turn away from anything that would so lead you astray again.”

“ Yes, that’s what I can’t get over. I know that he was false, and cruel, and dishonourable, but I can’t help loving him. I don’t want to have anything more to do with him. I want to do as God bids me, rather than listen to his beautiful words, and look into his noble face ; but do what I will I can’t help loving him, and that keeps me from God’s peace.”

“ It need not keep you from peace, dear. God forgives those who sin against Him, and goes on loving them. Pray for Sir Henry as often as you like ; our Saviour smiles upon you while doing so.”

“ Oh, does He ? how nice, how kind ; that makes me quite happy.”

When Joanna came in that evening, Jenny was less feverish than usual, and much more composed.

"I am better to-night," she whispered; "I have often been praying for him during the day, and it has made me so happy. I shall soon die, Miss Wallstein; I feel as if God was drawing me close under His wing, and I feel to love Him so!"

And thus the sky cleared as the evening shades drew on; the clouds erst so dark and lowering broke up, and floated away in feathery lines, gusts of wind, blowing for a while, hastened the clearing of the sky, and left the horizon bright, and the sun went down gloriously, painting each object exposed to its rays with burnished gold. Clearer and clearer the heavenly light shone in the face of the dying girl.

"All is well now," she said, "I am going to be one of God's angels; the greatest of men has stooped to love me, and has given me a white robe which covers all my impurity, and He will take me to a place grander than church or castle, and give me a name which shall make all my

shame forgotten; and He will give mother a noble gown too, better than of earthly silk, such as the angels will love to gaze upon; and He will learn Rose such music as they sing up there, and Bobby will have the schooling best for him. God makes no mistakes, and breaks no promises, and Jenny loves to go to God, mother."

These were the last words she spoke, but the smile that accompanied them never faded from her lips.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HONEYMOON.

Where shall the traitor rest,
He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden's breast,
Ruin and leave her?
Shame and dishonour sit
By his grave ever;
Blessing shall hallow it,—
Never, O never.—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

THE same sun whose setting rays gilded the last hours on earth of little Jenny, was busy at the same moment in turning the waters of the Rhine to gold. A lady, well-dressed, and of showy appearance, but whose pallid, careworn face belied the gaiety of her attire, walked quickly along one of the numerous paths in the Schloss Gartens at Mannheim, an expression of impatience crossing her brow whenever one of the many

frequenters of these public gardens encountered her, and disturbed her reverie. To avoid such interruptions, she passes through a gate leading to a wooded path skirting the margin of old father Rhine.

Lovely as this spot is, it is not popular; the broader walks of the public gardens offer a better stage for the exhibition of "the modes," and have the extra advantage of being provided with numerous spectators. So the lady finds the desired solitude on the river's banks.

Presently she seats herself upon a hillock formed of dried mud, which has been thrown up in the rainy season, and producing a casket from her pocket, she examines the contents curiously. Brilliants are there, of rare beauty, and in considerable quantity, but the owner does not look upon them with the satisfaction with which women generally regard the gems which they believe to heighten their charms. She lifts each jewel, returning again and again to a small glittering star, the least costly of the set.

"No, not even that!" she said sternly; "I will

not turn even that little one into money until he does me justice! I know we have no food in the house, I know that our lodgings are unpaid, but these diamonds are my last hold on him. He has sold all else, and gambled it away, and he shall not touch the proceeds of these until he gives me the shelter of his name. He is always on the search for them; I can scarcely keep them from him; but I had rather carry them to the police-station, acknowledge that they are stolen goods, and make my bed in the Rhine, than let him riot on the price of my soul, and then forsake me, and leave me to be the scorn and derision of my sex."

She rose, and carried her casket to the most secluded part of the wood; then she looked carefully about her, to be sure that none had dogged her steps; being satisfied on that point, she grooved a hole under a decayed stump, in which she laid the casket, and then tore sods from a green spot hard by, to cover all the ground.

She finished this work, dashed the dust from her gloves, and regained the wood path; but

started on meeting a certain German Jew who had managed many a little matter for her already.

“Goot evening, madam,” he said, with marked politeness; “I came here, hoping to speak with you.”

“Here, Mr. Trinkenspiel? How did you guess that I should come hither?”

“One told me that you had forsaken the Schloss Gartens by the small gate, also I followed you. I am sorry, very sorry, it does me harm to have to tell you that the mistress of your house insists on payment for the lodgings, and the tradespeople will not wait for their due any longer.”

“What am I to do? I have sold—you know how much—if I sell the rest, my husband will squander it too, and then we must starve.”

“Mr. Richard Henry says that he has lands and possessions in England; can he not raise money on them? I could manage such a little business for him, quick, quick! But the gentleman says you have hidden wealth, and wish to

compel him thereby to—to—a step he wishes to avoid.”

Sophy became crimson with shame and indignation: from the sly expression in the man’s face she saw that he was in possession of the secret of her disgraceful position.

“Mr. Trinkenspiel, I need offer no explanation to you, as I see Mr. Henry has already revealed to you the state of our affairs. Your information about the impatience of the lodging-mistress and the tradesmen does not afflict me. Let them do their worst. A few weeks in prison will give him time for reflection—not that I expect any repentance in his selfish nature. If he asks counsel from you, tell him I will not raise a shilling until he fulfils his promise of making me his lawful wife.”

“Mine goot lady, you are magnificent, daring, regal; you remind me of the Lady Macbeth drawn by your own great poet. But you forget; Mr. Henry may use force. Your person is in his power.”

“Force will not avail him. I have foreseen that danger.”

"Splendid lady! He says you carry the casket abroad with you."

She laughed scornfully.

"Not now," she said. "I have deposited it in safe keeping."

"Not with the police?"

"No, that is my dernier ressort. I go there and yield it and myself if he presses me too far. Let him marry me, and I will put all into his hands at once, if he insists upon it, though I would rather he would deposit the sum raised with you, and so secure an income for some years."

"Naturally, madam; your reasoning is just."

They entered the Schloss Gartens.

"Madam will prefer our separating now. I will explain madam's wishes to Mr. Henry, and if I can prevail on him to accede to madam's little plan, it will be delightful to me so to pleasure her."

Sophy traversed the straight-cut, commodious streets. She passed blocks of houses labelled with all the letters of the alphabet, till she came to a shabbier group, adorned with the letter T. Entering by a court-yard opening, she ascended

a common stair, and continued to climb wearily till she came to the fourth story. There she entered a shabby sitting-room, whose carpetless floor and scant furniture looked eminently un-homelike. A small bedroom opened into this sitting-room, and there she threw off her bonnet and shawl, returning listlessly to the larger apartment, and staring from the window, less from any interest in the similar block of houses opposite, labelled R, than from the entire absence of interest in anything else.

Two hours passed thus; heavy rain began to fall—such rain as falls on Mannheim for hours and for days together; a foot was heard on the stairs, and Dalzell entered the room. The two regarded each other curiously and defiantly.

“Were you impatient for my return?” asked Dalzell.

“No. I knew you would not be angelic in temper when you found that there was no supper and no fire.” She shivered as she spoke, for though the weather had been warm enough hitherto, the wet night diffused a chilliness through the air.

"I have had supper, and plenty of wine; I do not feel the cold," he said, with a malicious laugh.

She looked searchingly at him. There was a cunning triumph in his eyes which terrified her. "What have you been up to?" she asked, trembling.

"Field sports, my Lina, even rabbit hunting."

"What on earth do you mean? *Where* have you had the sport?"

"In the most romantic spot possible. On the banks of the Rhine?"

She was pale as a corpse. "And who was with you?"

"Mine goot friend, Trinkenspiel."

She sank upon the hard sofa. "And you found game?"

"Oh, yes; rare game. I had some of it for supper, and have left the rest in Trinkenspiel's larder. I would have brought some for my lady-love, but I feared she would be too virtuous to enjoy game killed by a man who is not her husband."

Sophy writhed in soul agony. "Henry, you

are remorselessly cruel ; no servant of the Inquisition could be more relentless in applying tortures than you. Tell me what you found in the wood ? ”

“ Tell me what you hid there ? ” he replied with a malicious smile.

“ Henry, you dare not treat me thus if I had father or brother. The fear of their sword or cudgel would compel you to make me your wife.”

“ Lina, my duty to posterity forbids it. Excuse plain speaking, my angel, but yours is not the character suited for a Lady Dalzell. What kind of principles would you instil into the minds of my heir and his sisters ? No, no ; the men of our family are gay, but our women are honest and true. No stain has rested on the character of any of my ancestresses.”

He said this with averted face ; she made no reply ; when he looked round he perceived that she had fainted.

By the mid-day train an English gentleman had arrived at Mannheim, looking travel-worn

and sadly dejected. He was very young, and good-looking; and as he trod the broad streets he looked every inch a gentleman. Carpet-bag in hand, he proceeded to the *Hôtel de l'Europe*, on the bank of the river, and engaging a room there, he ordered his dinner, deposited his carpet-bag, and inquired the way to the police-station.

There he made instant and minute inquiries for an English gentleman and lady, calling themselves Sir Henry and Lady Dalzell, and the inspector ran his eye over the list of foreign names in his books, but was sorry to inform monsieur that no such name was there.

"Then they are going by a feigned name," suggested Penrose, for the reader will already have identified the stranger as that worthy individual.

The inspector spread his hands like two extended wings, shrugged his shoulders, and with a deprecating look, said,—

"Naturally."

"You don't know any persons answering my description?"

“Momentarily, no. But I will write your description, and we shall keep our eyes open. ‘Tall, handsome, well dressed, air of grand seigneur; gentleman and lady, and *not* married.’ Ah!”

The man reflected awhile after making the above-mentioned minutes, and then he said,—

“There is a man, a German Jew; he scents out all the English, and makes gain by understanding their language. He would be likely to find the people for you; that is, if he is willing to do so.”

“Give me his address; I will go to him.”

“Say you have been here, and that I have directed you to him, assuring you that all the information you desire is to be found with him. Tell him, if he refuses to direct you, he will be asked the reasons of his refusal.”

Penrose thanked the policeman, and repaired to the address he had received; but Trinkenspiel was out.

Mr. Penrose said he would wait his return. It was a weary wait, for hour after hour passed, and

he came not. He was half inclined to go off to the hotel, take his dinner, and then return; but he suppressed the self-indulgent inclination, sure that if the man had any interest in concealing Dalzell's whereabouts, it was the worst possible thing to let him have warning that any one was in search of him.

About three o'clock the rain began to fall, and presently the Jew appeared.

Penrose stated his case, and asked his aid.

"Are you a friend of the Sir Henry Dalzell of which you speak?"

"One of his oldest friends—his fellow-officer."

A second thought corrected this expression in Penrose's mind, he having seen Dalzell's name recently in an English paper, with the words "dismissed the service" attached to it; but he did not think it necessary to make the correction plain to Trinkenspiel.

"I think I can guess who may be the parties in question; but I would rather consult them before bringing you to them. Please to give me your name."

Penrose put his card into the man's hand, and an English bank-note with it. "I wish to be taken to them direct—I mean them no harm; but I must insist on seeing them without delay. If you refuse me aid, I shall appeal, as desired by the inspector, to the police."

Trinkenspiel bit his lips, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "What can I then?" and beckoned Penrose to follow him.

Together, they reach T 3 stock 4, and knock lightly at the door. "Come in," replied a fierce voice. They open the door, to behold Sophy Hammerlye lying in a dead faint, and Dalzell regarding her with brutal indifference.

A pang of shame shot through the heart of the mercenary Trinkenspiel, and he darted down the stair to procure food and wine, while Penrose advanced to the baronet, and, pointing sternly to the fainting woman, asked,—

"Is that your wife?"

"What right have you to ask?" suddenly replied Dalzell.

"The right of her only male connexion, and

the right given me by my sword," replied Penrose, firmly.

"You know well enough, Pen," said the villain, in a deprecatory tone, "that we don't marry such women as these."

"Sophy Hammerlye's character is what you have made it!" exclaimed Penrose. "Unless you marry her to-morrow morning, you shall answer for your conduct regarding her to me, and for its other defalcations to the laws of your country."

"It is a deuced hard thing upon a poor fellow," whined Dalzell, "to be forced into a marriage with a woman of no character."

"Hold your peace!" roared Penrose. "What right have you to use the word 'character?' No epithet could blacken yours! No decent woman but what would feel it a degradation were you to enter her presence!"

"You forget that I am a baronet. Rank covers all slips: the ladies would forgive me the moment I smiled upon them."

Penrose ground his teeth; for, alas, he felt he could not truthfully controvert his statement.

Trinkenspiel returned with refreshments. They bathed Sophy's brow with water, and put wine to her lips. She regained consciousness, but looked about in bewilderment at the scene before her. Suddenly she recognized Penrose, and, throwing herself at his feet, cried out,—

“Pity and help me: oh, persuade him to marry me quickly!”

“He shall marry you to-morrow morning, or answer to me for his refusal to do so. It is too great an honour for him to be challenged to a gentlemanlike satisfaction, for him ‘dismissed the service.’ A horsewhip is a fitter weapon to hold over him than a soldier's sword.”

Dalzell recoiled at the words “dismissed the service!”

“I will put my head into the noose if there is no escape. I am weak and ill with hardship and want of food, and it is mean and cruel in you to hector over me, Penrose.”

“You are unnerved with drink and high play!” exclaimed Sophy, indignantly. “You feast royally, and leave me to starve alone. He has taken away

all my jewels, piece by piece," she said, addressing her brother-in-law, "and consumed their price in gambling and drinking. I have tasted no food to-day, but he has supped at a hotel."

Dalzell quailed under the contemptuous glance of his brother officer, and under his muttered epithet of "dastardly coward."

Penrose turned to Sophy,—

"Wretched woman!" he said. "You see what your unprincipled ambition has brought you to! I fear your case will be little bettered by marriage, but the disgrace will be saved to yourself and your family. I leave you now, to see you both to-morrow, be present at the service which *shall* take place, and then bid you farewell for ever. I cannot permit my wife to regard you any longer as a sister."

He turned, and descended the stair. The great gates were closed, but a small door cut in them yielded to his touch. He was closing it behind him, when he remembered the absence of truth in Dalzell's character, and the probability that he might attempt to elude him on the morrow. He

reflected a moment, and re-entered the gate, pacing up and down the darker side of the court to keep himself warm. This was no easy matter, seeing that he had no cloak, and had not eaten since breakfast; he determined to seek the shelter of the house, and stole softly up the stairs.

He had reached the third landing, when he heard cautious footsteps approaching, and ensconcing himself in an angle formed by an obtruding cupboard, he waited to see who was on the move. With a bag in one hand, and his boots in the other, Sir Henry turned the corner, and uttered a suppressed shriek as Penrose seized him by the collar.

“Just what I thought you equal to!” exclaimed the ensign. “Really, Sir Henry, you are giving me first-rate lessons in vice and cowardice; allow me to conduct you back to your apartments!”

Dalzell suffered him to lead him back like a whipped dog, but when they reached his door they found it locked.

“Have the goodness to produce the key,” said Penrose, and Dalzell obeyed, sulkily.

The first sight they saw on entering was Sophy stretched across the sofa, with a handkerchief laid on her mouth; the atmosphere of the room was sickening, being laden with chloroform.

“So you put her to sleep with chloroform in order to get away in peace? What a pity that such a well-laid plot should have miscarried!”

Penrose threw the window open, and fetching some water from the inner room dashed it in the face of the wretched woman. He saw a small phial of chloroform on the table, and he put it in his pocket, and then left the room, locking the door, and putting the key in his pocket. He heard Sophy's voice speaking in faint accents, and sulky growls from Dalzell in reply, and satisfied that they were safe till morning, he proceeded to establish himself in the snug corner he could find.

Accompanied by the unwilling Dalzell, he made every arrangement for the marriage in the morning, and did not lose sight of the pair until the English chaplain had spoken the words which entitled that rash and erring woman to the name

of the man who was already her cruel and unrelenting tyrant.

“God help you, Sophy,” he said, at parting; “a terrible lot is before you, but if he becomes too wantonly cruel you have now the laws of your country to appeal to.”

He would not listen to her thanks, but hastened away, and was soon steaming towards Paris again, glad that he had effected his purpose, but haunted by the rayless misery in the eyes of Lady Dalzell.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AFTERNOON POST.

Droop not though shame, sin, and sorrow surround thee,
Boldly fling off the dark chain that hath bound thee,
Look on yon pure heavens smiling beyond thee,

Rest not content with thy darkness, a clod !

Work for some good, be it ever so slowly,

Cherish some flower, be it ever so lowly,

Labour, all labour is noble and holy,

Let thy good deeds be thy prayer to thy God.

MRS. FRANCES OSGOOD.

NOEL ELLIOTT and Joanna saunter in the hilly wood into which Dalzell vainly attempted to entice her on the occasion of their second meeting. They climb higher and higher, now stopping to cull the autumn flowers, unable to resist the tempting contrast formed by the clumps of golden reed against the towering spires of foxgloves, or weaving chaplets of the glossy clusters of dog-wood berries, and now pausing breathless where

a recent clearing has left room to gaze upon the landscape stretching on every side in such grand variety of feature. Fields, and parks, and woods in front, dotted with mansions and farmhouses and picturesque hamlets; the Meander, with its wooded banks beyond, varied by many a grotesque mass of richly-tinted red rock, and hills greyer, and yet more grey, in the distance. 'Here and there a sulky-looking, dark cloud dimmed the glory of the autumn sky, and might readily be traced to the tall chimney just peeping from the woods on the river's bank, but neither Noel nor Joanna were of the selfish romantic school who profess to love God's inanimate works, and recoil from the highest part of His creation, stigmatizing the signs of labour and the cypher of commerce as blots upon the beautiful. Our wanderers regretted the clouds, but looked at them with interest, as indications that beneath, hundreds of their brethren were earning their bread in the sweat of their brow, and performing their appointed work, for their diligence in which they must give account to the Great Overseer of bond and free.

“God help them!” ejaculated Noel. “Good and evil grow apace where man herds with his fellows. We want God among us, for all safety lies with Him!”

“Dear Noel, I want to talk to you about Emma Hammerlye. She is working so steadily, and has such a frank, open expression in her face now. One or two efforts of hers have been successful, and she has some hopes for other engagements; but she wants more work; hers is an active nature, and she will languish if left in idleness.”

“I will give my best attention to Miss Emma’s interests if you will settle a point very nearly affecting mine. We have known each other so long, and through so many sources, that I cannot think a long engagement is necessary for cultivating a mutual acquaintance. We are already one in heart and feeling, Joanna; let me entreat you to name a day on which you will let me take possession of my treasure altogether.”

Joanna’s beautiful eyes were fixed on the sward; but she joined her hands around the stalwart arm

of her betrothed, and her sweet face was turned towards him, as she answered,—

“I have no reluctance to fix a day myself, dearest, but I grieve for Lady Mary. She has rejoiced with me in my bright prospects with the most unselfish sympathy; but I cannot bring her to speak of her own future. An expression of such intense pain crosses her face at every allusion to my leaving her, that I shrink from the subject. If you can bear to wait a little, I think she will speak to you herself.”

“I will lead her to do so. Your readiness to indulge my wishes makes me very happy, darling. I shall consider now that you have given me the power to arrange with Lady Mary.”

A closer pressure of his arm was her only reply; and after a pause, during which each heart stopped to luxuriate in its full satisfaction, he resumed the subject he had waived before.

“You want occupation for Emma Hammerlye’s pencil? Look at that cloud over the river far to the right. That is caused by the furnaces in a china manufactory. There the artist’s skill is well

paid. If the young lady can so far lay aside her pride as to work with others in one room, her real talent will soon raise her to the highest work, and she will earn at least five and twenty shillings a week. She could lodge where she is now ; she is strong, and a walk of three or four miles would be very good for her at the beginning and end of a day of sedentary occupation. If her mind is really of the powerful nature you believe, and has received a right bent, she may be of incalculable use to the other young women employed near her ; and her rapid talented etchings can be thrown off during any half-hour in an evening. Do you approve my plan ? ”

“ It takes away my breath. Is it new and strange to place a gentlewoman in such an establishment ? ”

“ It is neither new nor strange, my own Joanna, for a gentlewoman to fall into the lowest abysses of vice from sheer want and misery. I would have it a daily and familiar occurrence for impoverished gentlewomen to engage themselves in manufactures, occupying themselves with such

work as I have described. I would have them received with all honour in their own class, instead of being looked down upon because they have descended to labour. If of really cultivated mind and high character, they would thus raise the tone of the room in which they worked, and, through it, of all employed in the factory. There are not wanting ladies of rank and position willing to enter these places as missionaries; but if more would enter as workers, acting as leaven upon the lump, a far greater work would be achieved, and a grand breach opened for reduced gentlewomen to escape from the terrible dangers of poverty. If you can persuade Miss Emma to regard this matter as a simple question of right and wrong, and not judge it by conventional rules, I think she will give the plan a trial."

"I feel sure she will. Conventional rules signify little to her, for she feels herself ousted from society. I have very little doubt of her adopting your suggestion."

In descending the hill they were joined by Jans and Margaret.

"We were on our way to Elliott's Cray," said the former.

"I admire your ingenuity in contriving a round-about-way thither," laughed Noel. "I should think you are fully three miles out of your bearings."

"Oh, of course. We only meant to take a walk first. I have just come out from Overstone, and as I was getting our own afternoon letters I brought you yours."

"Many thanks. You mean kindly, but I prefer my letters coming at the accustomed time. I am prepared for the infliction at breakfast-time, but not just before my dinner."

He examined the three letters put into his hand.

"That is from the upholsterer; I will keep it to season my egg with. This is a special application, and can bide its time. Ah, here is one in a strange hand; I had better look at it."

The three walked forward, leaving the squire to read his letter in the background; it ran thus:—

" Ranelagh Hotel.

" DEAR MR. ELLIOTT,

" You may or may not remember my name, but I entertain a lively remembrance of the hospitality I met with under your roof. It has been my fate to pass much of my life among selfish people, and having found a different spirit in you, I turn naturally to ask your help in a duty imposed upon me, but which I cannot fulfil alone.

" I left your neighbourhood without any distinct idea as to where I should go, for I was half mad. The reason of my sudden grief was entirely personal, and you will excuse my entering upon it. When I reached London an opportunity was offered me for joining a regiment under immediate orders for India; and I eagerly availed myself of it, hoping that change of scene and abundance of occupation would rest my tortured mind. I did not find myself mistaken; amid my responsible duties my personal griefs ceased to perplex and harass me. I am now at home again for a short time, on special leave, and have spent most of my

holiday in the business which brought me here. Another important commission lies on my conscience, about which I now consult you.

“When visiting at Elliott’s Cray I heard Dalzell speak of a Miss Wallstein, who, I suppose, formed one of your circle of acquaintance. If she is still within reach of you, or you can gain any particulars relative to her history, pray communicate with me, in person, if possible.

“Reasons which you will indulge me by not inquiring into, prevent my coming down to investigate the matter I have in hand, so I hope you will not feel that I am presuming on your good nature in asking you to give me the meeting in London. Do not arouse Miss Wallstein’s curiosity by telling her of my summons, as it might give rise to false hopes in case she did not prove to be the person in question.

“Believe me to be

“Very faithfully yours,

“LOVEL MANYACRE.”

Noel read the letter, and returning it to its envelope, placed it carefully in his pocket-book—

the regularly used pocket-book, not the one dedicated to Joanna's white chrysanthemum. He then quickened his pace, and soon rejoined his companions, taking Joanna upon his arm again.

"It was well you brought me the letter, Jans," he said; "it was upon a matter of some importance, and will necessitate my travelling to town by to-night's express."

"You travel to-night?" exclaimed Joanna, in a disappointed tone; "shall you be long absent? The days will seem so blank without you."

He looked fondly down upon the lovely face, beaming with such true affection upon him.

"I daresay I shall only need to be two or three days away, love. I cannot explain my business to you, for it concerns another and not myself."

Her frank, cordial smile assured him of her absolute trust in him being quite above the need of explanations.

They now hastened their return home, and Elliott parted from his beloved one, promising to look in, as he drove to the station, to say good-by.

As he made his preparation for his journey, his

mind was full of wild speculations. He fancied that Major Manyacre must have associated Miss Wallstein with Dalzell, and that some reports of the ripened villany of the latter having reached his ear, he wished to warn the girl of his real character. Other speculations flitted across his mind as to the communication the major might have to make, but his opinion ever decided in favour of its taking the form of a caution against Dalzell.

His carpet-bag is ready, his dinner is discussed, his good horse waits at the door, and Noel Elliott sets forth on his journey. A few precious moments spent at Fairlawn, his arm encircling his beloved Joanna, a hurried farewell to Lady Mary, and the journey begins in earnest. The dog-cart is exchanged for a railway carriage, the railway carriage for a room, No. 463 in the Great Western Hotel ; London life begins with waggons and wains, pressed onward in cabs and 'busses, reaches the tide of professional men's carriages, and Noel Elliott stops his Hansom at the Ranelagh Hotel.

The tête-à-tête with Major Manyacre began with inquiries after old friends and acquaintances. All Noel's pre-conceived opinions were upset by the major's questions about the health of Sir Ronald Dalzell, and the career of his son. An answer to these inquiries formed a long preface to whatever of business had to follow.

"Well, I always thought him an unprincipled, self-indulgent fellow; but I never guessed him to be such a dastardly villain as he has turned out."

"His villany developed by degrees. No man attains a capacity for crime at one bound. Constant idolatry of self, constant sacrifice of truth, justice, and mercy develop the power of evil until the mind shrinks from no depth of iniquity. Dalzell began by cold-blooded self-indulgence, and has ended by becoming a very plague among men!"

"And young Penrose, what is he about? He used to be a great admirer of Dalzell."

"He has married Julia Hammerlye, the younger sister of the unhappy girl who eloped with Dalzell.

He seems an honest young fellow ; and I trust Dalzell's fall will warn him against his example."

"I trust so too. Now tell me what you know of Miss Wallstein, for it is of her in particular that I wish to speak."

"Miss Wallstein has been resident among us for several years. She is one of those rare beings in whom all beauty of person and of mind meet. Although a poor dependent, her influence is so genial, so pure and holy, that she diffuses peace and good-will wherever her lot is cast. The lady with whom she lives used to be fretful and irritable, her temper being warped by some life-long sorrow, which weighed heavily upon her ; but under Joanna's gentle influence, she has become gentle and self-sacrificing, so much so that all we neighbours now regard the Lady Mary Morton as one of the most valued and beloved in our circle of friends."

The brow of Major Manyacre contracted, as if with pain, and he replied hastily,—

"It is of Miss Wallstein that I wish to hear the

history. Pray, favour me with any particulars of her past with which you may be acquainted."

"My friend Jans was a kind of a guardian to her; and from him I first learned her early history. Her father was a London merchant of immense fortune and boundless credit. The stupidity or rascality of a partner brought ruin upon the noble house, as complete as it was sudden. By unremitting labour and self-denial Mr. Wallstein succeeded so far in retrieving his affairs as to be able to pay a very satisfactory dividend to his creditors. Shortly after this he died, leaving only a small annuity to his wife. After her death, Joanna was left all but penniless."

"Did she never mention to you that she had a brother?"

"She has only once named him to me. He was sent to India in hopes of being able to recover the remains of his father's property, and it is supposed that he died there, as they have never been able to hear anything of him. Miss Wallstein feels sure that he is dead. Tell me what your reason is for inquiring about him?"

“Merely because I happen to be able to confirm her impression. He died in my arms in his bungalow at Bombay.”

“In your arms! how wonderful. This intelligence will greatly agitate Miss Wallstein, and, as she believes him dead already, and has so believed for years, I do not think it is desirable to inform her at present that he was living till within a recent period.”

“I see much to recommend your opinion,” replied Major Manyacre; “but, nevertheless, I fear the shock cannot be spared to Miss Wallstein.”

“Why not?”

“Because of the root of all evil, Mr. Elliott, which is equally ready to destroy the living or to wake the dead. Money may break the peace, or re-make it.”

“I still object to agitating Miss Wallstein, Major Manyacre. To be candid with you, Miss Wallstein is shortly to become my wife; I would gladly postpone any harrowing reminiscences until I have full power to soothe and comfort her.

In the meanwhile, I am quite prepared to answer any demands which you may have to make on her brother's behalf, without reference to her."

Major Manyacre extended his hand across the table, and grasped that of Noel Elliott. "Mr. Elliott, I am proud to call you my friend! Men like you restore one's faith in human nature. You take a penniless wife, and offer to pay her brother's debts without even claiming her gratitude for so doing!"

"If you knew Miss Wallstein, major, you would see how naturally all right actions must flow from love to her!"

"Bravo! rich, getting on towards forty, and honestly in love! You are a fine fellow, Elliott! And I doubt not she is worthy of you—good and beautiful—ah, of how little comparative value are riches!"

"Very little," was the quiet rejoinder. "Will you go into the accounts now?"

"Only roughly. I am Mr. Wallstein's executor." There was a sly look in the corner of his eye, as he continued—"It is my painful duty to state

that Mr. Wallstein left one hundred and seventy thousand pounds in funded property to his sister."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Noel.

"True, and you may see the vouchers. There is also a quantity of splendid jewellery."

"Astounding! I cannot realize the fact. How was it that her brother concealed himself from her so long?"

"I will tell you all that presently. We will have dinner, and drink the health of the bride-elect, and after dinner you shall have her brother's history.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LIFE OF THE WANDERER.

Well nigh the toils
Of that apprenticeship to savage life
Had vanquish'd his sick spirit; but the end
Was too momentous to be thus resign'd
At Nature's weak revolvings: and he gain'd,
Hour after hour, a mastery more complete
Over her secret springs.

CATHARINE GRACE GODWIN.

LATER in the evening the two gentlemen drew their seats close to the fire, and Major Manyacre began his recital.

“Immediately after we went out, our regiment was ordered into the interior, to overawe some malcontents which were manifesting themselves there. We reached a secluded part of the country, never before occupied as a military station, and accommodated ourselves as best we

could. Several wealthy men sought our acquaintance, and amongst the rest a European whose appearance was so prematurely aged, that he at once attracted my attention. This gentleman introduced himself as Mr. Wallstein, and I soon found in him a most agreeable companion.

“After our intimacy had continued for some time, he made me acquainted with the sad state of his health, and the causes which had tended to wreck his constitution so early in life. He said that a stain on his father’s honour had induced him to cast prudence to the winds, and, despising alike the unhealthiness of the climate and the inconvenience of a position so far from the reach of European friends, to locate himself where money could most rapidly be amassed. He identified himself so much with the natives, speaking their language, and conforming to their rules, that he escaped without hurt to person or fortune in the great and horrible mutiny.

“There was always a deep sadness in his tone, and a loneliness of heart, which made me grieve for him, though it drew us nearer in friendship

and sympathy. We were one in this, that we had both loved fervently, and were both bereaved of that we had held dear.

“In process of time he began to speak more definitely of the past, of his father’s high character and noble appearance ; of his mother’s purity and gentleness ; and the great beauty and charm of his young sister. At such times his eyes had a depth of tenderness, and his voice a pathos, which revealed all the power of love which his rich nature possessed.

“‘Were all gone?’ I asked ; ‘what had become of the sister?’

“‘Lost ! lost !’ was the reply, with a look of blank despair.

“‘What?’ I exclaimed ; ‘so carefully trained with such parents, can she have gone to ruin?’

“He gazed upon me in mute amazement. Then he rose, and with one hand raised to heaven and the other pressed to his heaving breast, he said, slowly and solemnly,—

“‘As sure as I believe that God is in heaven so sure am I that He has kept my darling true

to her high nature, her pure womanhood. My sister, my beautiful Joanna, you may be in heaven, or beyond my ken on earth, but wherever you are God is with you, and your life is one with Him.'

"I was shocked with his look of horror, and hastened to explain that I had but misunderstood his own expression. His manner became calm, and he presently continued to speak as before.

"'For a time,' he said, 'I had no means of communication with England, and I hardly desired to have. To regain what the Indian branch of my father's house had lost, was as impossible as to gather up water once spilled upon the ground. So I turned every energy of my life to making a new fortune. I rose early, and late took rest, and ate the bread of carefulness; and presently had gathered a good sum together. Then I went to Bombay, and tried to gain intelligence of my people. But my letters were returned through the dead-letter office; and, after much questioning, I learned that my father and mother were dead, and my sister could not be traced. I resolved to

gain more, to double my possessions, and then to repair myself to England, and search the kingdom from one end to the other, sure, by so doing, that I should find my little Joanna, if she continued alive.'

" 'And when will you do this?' I asked.

" He spread out his hands, pointed to his pallid face and attenuated limbs, and said, 'I shall never go thither; unquestionably I am dying! If I could get to Bombay, the doctors might do something for me; but I despair of ever achieving that journey.'

" I thought him unnecessarily depressed, and assured him that I believed his life was good for many a year to come; but he only shook his head. All continuing in perfect quiet, we received orders to return to Bombay, and I hastened to offer Mr. Wallstein the convenience of our escort. It was only on our journey that it occurred to my mind that, when visiting at Elliott's Cray, I had heard a Miss Wallstein spoken of.

" But my poor friend was so exhausted by each stage of his journey, that I dared not give him any

exciting intelligence, so I stored my thoughts till we reached Bombay.

“There the doctors were summoned, but their skill only discovered more certainly the hopelessness of his case, and they candidly told him that he had but a very short time to live.

“Then he called me to his side, and on reaching him I found a lawyer there already. He wished for my consent to be named in his will as executor. He bequeathed one hundred and seventy thousand pounds, and all the jewellery he had collected, to his sister; handsome legacies to several public charities, which legacies were to be quadrupled in case his sister should be already dead; and he made me residuary legatee.

“When all these business matters were settled, the poor fellow’s mind seemed at rest. Then, as I used to sit by him, I ventured to tell him of the name I had heard at Elliott’s Cray, and that the lady was described as very beautiful. He was deeply interested and soothed by this. ‘It is she,’ he said; ‘I know it for a certainty. When we get so near the eternal state, our butterfly eyes

are half grown, and through a crack in our chrysalis case we can see beyond the ken of healthy mortals. I know the person you spoke of is my sister, and I know, too, that our faithful God is keeping her free from evil, her garments pure, and her heart in peace !' He spoke of her hourly from that time, commending her to my care. 'Yours is a kind heart, major,' he said ; 'and you have none to love : be a father to my Joanna.'"

Major Manyacre covered his face as he spoke, and a heavy groan escaped him.

"You will fulfil his dying wish, my friend," said Noel gently, as he would have spoken to a woman. "Come back with me to Elliott's Cray, and Joanna will be persuaded to hasten her marriage, that you may act father on the occasion."

"To Elliott's Cray!" cried the major, recoiling as if stung to agony. "Never, never. I will pray God to bless the sweet girl, but not go near that place. Why, I dare say the marriage will take place from the—the—lady's house with whom she has lived?"

"Of course it must be so. Lady Mary Morton has been a true mother to Joanna. Poor thing,

she has no one to love on earth except my little girl; and yet she as heartily rejoices in her brightened prospects as if she was not herself thereby deprived of the only sunshine of her own desolated home. To neglect one so noble and unselfish would be indeed base, a baseness impossible to Joanna."

The major was deathly pale. "Wait here," he said, "and I will bring you the jewels. Only another fortnight of my leave remains, and then I bid adieu to England for ever. Go down to Overstone, tell Miss Wallstein all that I have told you, and if it be not too great a request, come back and see me before I leave. The 18th of January is the date of poor Wallstein's death, as I told you. I was with him to the last."

Noel could say no more, only promise to return as he wished. He took charge of the heavy case of jewellery, not caring to examine any of the articles, and returning to his hotel, betook himself to rest, desiring the boots to call him in time for the first train in the morning.

He had been far too much engaged the pre-

vious day to write any orders to his servants, so, of course, there was no trap to meet him at Overstone station. He gave his bag to a porter to carry, and started on foot for his home, the precious casket under his own arm.

As he was passing Sylvester it occurred to him that Joanna might possibly be there, and so he turned in, making his way straight to the drawing-room window. His guess proved correct ; for there sat Joanna on a low stool by Bertha's couch, fresh flowers in her lap, some of which she was wreathing round the neck of a white Italian greyhound which Mr. Jans had brought his sister as a gift from Paris. Her pure white dress, warmed for the autumn landscape by a scarlet duffel cloak, reminded him of her brother's solemn faith in her purity of heart.

Both the ladies greeted Noel with welcoming affection, but there was a pathos in his tone and manner with Joanna which startled her sensitive solicitude.

"Has anything gone wrong, dearest Noel?" she asked, looking anxiously in his face.

"Nothing wrong, love, but I have much to speak of to you. Come and walk in the garden; we have walked there before, have we not?" and he added, "Mind your feet are warmly shod." He drew her arm within his, and led her on until they reached a summer-house. "We shall chat more quietly here than moving about," he said, and, covering a seat with his cloak, he placed her upon it. Then he laid aside her hat, passed his arm round her, and drew her head on to his shoulder, and, pressing his lips to her brow for a moment, he said, softly,—

"Joanna, I have seen one who closed your brother's eyes."

She started, and looked wildly in his face. But she saw there nothing but sympathy, united with manly strength, so she calmed herself, and her head sank slowly back on to its place of rest. For a while she was silent; but, as memory dwelt on the early past, the tears fell quickly, and she said,—“How little I suspected that I was cherishing hope, but I now feel as if I had been blessed in possessing him up to this moment!”

For some time she wept quietly, all her agitation melting into soft tears by his tenderness; and then she began to question him further, but not till then, till she had drawn from him all the information which Major Manyacre had given to Elliott, all but the fact of the large bequest, and upon that point it never entered her mind to inquire.

They had been upwards of two hours in the summer-house, and the autumn evening was turning chill.

“Come back to the house now, my darling,” he said; “you will not mind the presence of my aunts, and I want to show you the jewellery that your brother has bequeathed to you.”

She looked wonderingly in his face, and rose to accompany him within doors.

It was a dazzling sight, that array of Indian jewellery. Brilliants were there as splendid as those for which Sophy Hammerlye had sold her integrity; heavy gold chains and bracelets; gems of every tint, sparkling like lamps in an illumination, and strings upon strings of coral, which Noel wound round and round the raven locks of

his betrothed, encircling with them also neck and waist and arms. All admired the beauty of the costly gems, and Joanna shed many a tear as she gazed upon them, regarding them as so many expressions of her brother's love.

"Not lost, but gone before," whispered Noel, as aunt Bertha stole from the room, following Mr. and Mrs. Jans to the dining-room. "I don't bid my darling not to weep, that would be unnatural; but, I would point her gaze upward to the home of rest where her travel-worn brother finds peace and love and joy after his long and weary journey."

"Yes, dear Noel," she replied, leaning her head against his shoulder, and giving free vent to her sobs, "I am looking upward. My tears are not for his translation, but for the unsolaced life he led, the self-denial he practised, to leave these noble possessions to me. I am glad of them, Noel, I am prouder of you for taking a poor wife than I should have been of the fortune which I once longed to bring you; but I am glad to be adorned by my own fond brother,

as the great and noble of earth are adorned, to make me fitter for your bride."

There was such a mixture of pride and meekness in her look as she said this, that he gazed with renewed wonder at her beauty ; then, encircling her with his arm, he said softly,—

"Your brother left you wealth also, Joanna."

She started, laid her hands upon his shoulders, and looked long and searchingly in his face ; then she said slowly,—

"Are you sure ? But the money cannot rest with me. Were the most princely fortune bequeathed to me, I should still be a penniless girl."

"I don't understand you, dearest. Explain what you mean."

"How much has my brother left me, Noel ?"

"One hundred and seventy thousand pounds."

She held herself erect, her glance raised loftily, such a look of pride he had never seen in her face before. Gracefully she waved her hands with an outward motion, as if emptying them of something

which had filled them to overflowing, and fixing afresh an earnest look on Mr. Elliott, she exclaimed,—

“It is not mine! Every shilling must go to clear the remainder of my father’s debts.”

For some moments neither spoke; then Noel opened his arms, and she fled into them.

“You are right, Joanna, and I glory in your integrity. By to-night’s post I will send an advertisement to the *Times*, calling together all to whom the firm of Wallstein, Filmer, and Co. owe anything.”

The girl burst into tears.

“Noel, you shall never repent your noble furtherance of my wishes,” she said.

The darkness was drawing on, and Joanna remembered she ought to return to Lady Mary. Noel wrapped her cloak around her, put on her little goloshes, and would have tied her hat, only he could by no means divine how the elastic band was made to attach itself to her massive coils of hair. She laughed at his clumsiness, while she loved it better than the most studied address, and

clung gratefully to his arm, as he led her forth into the darkness.

“Lady Mary will be so interested with all we have to tell her. You have never said how the gentleman guessed you knew anything of me.”

“The gentleman! Did I not tell you it was Major Manyacre?”

Joanna stopped short in mute amazement.

“Major Manyacre, you know. The fellow who was at Overstone. We all liked him, only we suspected he had something to do with Lady Mary.”

“To do! Oh, Noel, he is her husband! She loves him truly, and never sinned against him. He separated from her on a mere suspicion; and after all these years of sorrow and anguish, he owes her such a reparation.”

“Joanna, I believe it is given to the true to recognize truth. All true persons shrank from the Hammerlyes in their life of falsehood. If Lady Mary’s statement carries conviction to your mind, I have great faith in its being true. Moreover, Lady Mary’s character has become one of such

high and delicate principle, that I attach great faith to her assertion. In her secret converse with you she would rather own and lament a fault, than deny it if she had erred."

"Dearest Noel, at the risk of her thinking my prolonged absence strange, I must ask you to linger on the way. Lady Mary told me her story in confidence, but the greatness of the need justifies my relating it to you. Oh, if the poor major could be persuaded to see things in a just light, how his life would be enriched by Lady Mary's faithful love!"

"Enriched! It would make earth into heaven for him. I see he has strong and deep affection, and that he suffers keenly from her fancied desertion. Tell me her story, beloved, and I will travel back to London this very night, and try my powers of persuasion with the major. It would be a due return for his kindness to your brother, if we could give back to him his wife and his home!"

"It would indeed. I have never seen him, and therefore cannot guess whether or no the task

you impose upon yourself will be a very difficult one."

"Most difficult, I fear. He is the kind of man of all others the most difficult to approach on a personal question. At the present moment I can hardly see a hope of being able to convey the needful assurance of the poor lady's integrity, before he has time to forbid the subject. But the path of duty is so plain that it admits of no hesitation. I will at once, therefore, return to London, and risk his displeasure, if by so doing I can assure him of the faithfulness of his wife. The utmost he can do will be, to bid me confine myself to my own affairs; whilst, by such risk, I may possibly insure his happiness and that of Lady Mary!"

"You are right, Noel, and judgment will be given you to speak and act wisely. I have implicit faith in your success; all the more so because you recognize the difficulty of your undertaking."

CHAPTER XVI.

MEDIATION.

Qui veut procurer le bien des autres a déjà assuré le sien.
—*Chinese Proverb.*

MAJOR MANYACRE looked greatly astonished when Noel Elliott presented himself again in his private room, after such brief delay ; and there was an uneasy doubt in his mind as to the cause of such haste, which gave some embarrassment to his manner.

“ Miss Wallstein bid me hasten to convey her thanks to you, Major Manyacre, for your friendship to her brother ; your account of him affected her deeply, and she says she can never rest until she has returned your kindness.”

“ Nay, my friend,” replied the major, “ anything that I was able to do for the poor exile has been

repaid doubly already. I told you that he had made me residuary legatee ; and, after paying off all legacies, enough remains materially to increase my own fortune. Then, again, it is no small joy to me to be made the channel for conveying reward to one so generous and disinterested as yourself ! ”

Noel smiled frankly.

“ Can you guess Joanna’s intention with reference to the disposal of her fortune ? ”

“ Why, my good sir, that may be done without the gift of second sight. When a girl is engaged to marry a young fellow whom she ardently loves, one does not need to wonder long respecting her disposal of her money. In equity, even, she has no choice in the matter. ”

“ She does not mean to bring one shilling of it to me. ”

The major looked dismayed.

“ Elliott, I feel for you more than I can express ! Then the acquisition of fortune has changed her nature, or rather demonstrated it to be other than you before believed it. This is a horrible trial to you ; but it is better, far better,


that you should have found her out before marriage; afterwards, it would have been the ruin of your life's happiness. You will never see her again, of course?"

"Oh, of course! I left her with all speed, not giving her a moment for explanation. It is perfectly patent, that if she wishes to give her fortune to another, she must love that other better than me, what use, therefore, could it be to let her speak?"

"None whatever. Ah, well, all women are alike!"

"They resemble each other very strongly!" rejoined Elliott.

It was the squire's first stroke at diplomacy, and he would never have hit upon it but for a habit he had of reading his Bible daily. He had been puzzling his brain during his midnight journey as to what would be the best plan of gaining a hearing from the major, and his ingenuity failed him utterly. Presently he remembered that he should have little time, after snatching a few hours of rest on his arrival in London, before proceeding to



the *Times* office, and to the major at his hotel, so he unlocked his carpet-bag and drew forth his Bible for his morning reading. The chapter that came in due course was Nathan's parable of the ewe-lamb, and Noel felt that it shed a new light upon the difficult matter he had in hand.

He continued for some time with the major, speaking upon any and every subject, except the one forming his grand object. His friend led him back to speak of Joanna.

"Oh, don't talk of her," he said pettishly; "she has been spoiled. Lady Mary has treated her like a younger sister rather than a dependent. If she had made her life with her a sterner matter, she would have been more grateful to me."

"Lady Mary will not surely encourage this abominable resolution. No, no; that is not in her nature."

"She ought to turn her out of doors, but I doubt her having strength to do so. The girl saved her life and her honour by nursing her through a most dangerous attack of brain fever which she had some fifteen months ago. In her

delirium she raved constantly about her husband, imploring him to examine certain papers which would establish her innocence; and as soon as Miss Wallstein heard her romancing in that style she turned the servants out, and kept sole charge of her herself; she knew what gossip and slander might be founded on such delirious ravings."

"She did well and nobly!" said the major, with compressed lips. "Was that after I left the neighbourhood?" he asked, with assumed indifference.

"Yes. The poor lady was seized with illness at a picnic at Boulston. By-the-by, it was the very day you were unexpectedly summoned to London. When I came, expecting to find you, I only found the Lady Mary in a dead faint upon the floor."

The husband's face worked painfully; every muscle twitched, but he controlled himself by a strong effort, and said—"You will dine with me, Elliott?"

"No, I thank you, I have some business to attend to, I will see you again early in the morning."

He departed, and transacted various affairs with

reference to his approaching marriage, giving his lawyer instructions regarding settlements, &c. He had particular reasons for wishing not to hold further conversation with Major Manyacre until he should have seen the morrow's *Times*.

Betaking himself to rest in good time, he slept soundly, awaking to the joy of the possession of his noble Joanna, and smiling again and again, during his dressing, at the contrast between the real state of his heart and that in which Major Manyacre believed it to be.

Towards noon the next day Noel again repaired to the Ranelagh, and found his friend pacing his room in great excitement. "Have you seen this morning's *Times*?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, it was brought with my breakfast."

"Well, then, you know all about it?"

"About what? Do explain yourself, my friend. I saw nothing unusual in the paper; surely our Queen has not become a papist, nor has any merchant prince paid off the national debt!"

"No, but Joanna Wallstein has advertised for

her father's creditors ! Read that, and you will see what she intends to do with her fortune."

Noel read the advertisement which he himself had drawn up, paid for, and deposited at the office yesterday ; he looked up at the major, asking—


" Well, what then ? "

" Well, you may justly be indignant at her giving away her fortune without your leave, but you can't be jealous ; you can't feel that she is other than a noble and high-minded woman."

" Major Manyacre, you are requiring me to hear reason and to act upon it, neither of which things you have a right to attempt."

" Pooh, Elliott ! Every man who sees another running his head against a wall with his eyes shut, has a right to cry, ' Hallo, look out ! ' and this I say to you. You love and are loved by a pure, true-hearted woman, and you would desolate your heart and life, by throwing her from you on a suspicion already proved to be groundless. Go back and forgive her ; you took her to your heart, knowing her to be penniless, she is no less poor than she then was."

Elliott advanced, and laid his hand on the



major's shoulder. "This I say to you," he said, slowly, and quoting his own words,—“You love and are loved by a pure and true-hearted woman, and you have desolated your own heart by throwing her from you on a mere suspicion, which I can prove to be groundless. Come with me, and forgive her, or rather, ask her to forgive you. Your Lady Mary is as true and noble as my Joanna.”

The major sank into a seat, covering his face with his hands. “You probe a wound, Mr. Elliott,” he said, in tremulous accents, “which has been the torture of my life. The slightest approach to it makes every nerve quiver, yet you dare to handle it; beware how far you venture!”

“Major Manyacre, the surgeon does not desist from his task for the quivering of the nerves; he probes deeper till the bullet is found; otherwise, no cure could be effected. Do what you will with me; turn me from your door, and still I will say firmly, and on my honour, that the Lady Mary, your wife, has ever been true to you, and that the familiarity you saw was the first and the last that your false friend attempted.”

"But she did not resent it. She sat quiet and immovable."

"She was transfixed by your gaze, and so lost her presence of mind ; but she was not less astonished at his impudent act than yourself. You know she is not a strong-minded woman, nor one whom you could expect to act a very decided and daring part."

"No, no, I know that. But her silence was so guilty ; and in all her subsequent proceedings she made no appeal to me, neither did she explain in any way the terms on which she stood with her base lover."

"She says she wrote to you several times, and at great length ; that she sent all the letters to your lawyer, and enclosed some from your false friend to her ; but that she never received a word in reply from you, and that the lawyer insulted her."

"The scoundrel ! I received sealed packets from him, containing deeds and many other such things, but no letters. Happily I have them with me, and I can show them to you."

He produced a bunch of keys, and, selecting one, proceeded to apply it to the lock of a tin case. But it was long before he succeeded in opening the lid, for his hand trembled so much that he could not at first insert the key in the proper place. At last, however, he took out various packets, tied with red tape and ostentatiously sealed. These he opened, breaking the seals and tugging impatiently at the tape, now breaking it, now hurting his own fingers, and letting the liberated parchments roll to the floor in wild confusion. He was deathly pale, and his lip quivered painfully whilst thus engaged, and his whole frame was agitated by the deepest emotion.

Three packets have been opened, and their contents lie mingled on the table, or have rolled to the floor ; a fourth packet is in his hands. The tape of this seems newer, and it appears altogether as if it had been more studiously prepared. In vain he tries to break the tape with his fingers, or to tear open the envelope. It is too securely fastened and defies all the force he can use ; and it is still held in several directions, when Noel pro-

duces his penknife, and cuts the string at every junction. The two outside parchments fall from together, and set free some half-dozen unopened letters carefully wedged between them, which also fall to the ground.

The major sank into a chair, fearfully agitated; every vein in his forehead was swollen like whipcord, his lips were blue, his complexion pallid, except where a scar disfigured the left cheek, and that was purple like his lips. Noel felt alarmed, but he was sure that there was no safety except in proceeding. He gathered up the letters, therefore, and put them into his trembling hands. Four were addressed to Major Manyacre, two to the Lady Gertrude Manyacre; but all were unopened.

The poor agitated creature fumbled at the envelopes, and then read the contents eagerly. He shuddered as he opened those of Sir Robert Barton, and groaned aloud as his eye fell upon one passage. "I never heard so much ado made about nothing; I am hunted down and compelled to defend my life, when I have never received any favour at your hand that you would not have

accorded to the merest acquaintance. Your absurd pre-occupation of mind and heart has nullified all my attempts at advance; and the only reward for my long and faithful devotion to you is abuse and threats from your husband for privileges which I have never enjoyed. Surely you can defend yourself at least, if not me, from this most unfounded and unjust accusation?"

His wife's letters were mere passionate appeals to his affection, and entreaties to grant her an interview. The cruel lawyer, from the basest of motives, had hidden these letters, while acting up to the external meaning of his assertion that he had forwarded them to her frantic husband.

Major Manyacre was accounted a stern and impressive, though a just and upright man in his regiment, yet hot drops fell from his eyes as he perused these old letters, and many a groan of agony escaped between his compressed lips. Elliott dared not leave him, yet shrank from witnessing his emotion; so he walked to a window, and busied himself in counting the cabs and omnibuses which tore along the streets, and the foot

passengers hurrying along the slippery causeways. Presently the major addressed him.

“Elliott, I am almost at my wits’ end; you must act for me. I have been a cursed fool, that is certain. Tell me, is a reconciliation possible; and how shall I go about it?”

“Not only possible, my dear sir, but most earnestly desired. I knew nothing of this matter till yesterday; but when I mentioned to Joanna the name of her brother’s friend, she exclaimed that you were the husband of the lady passing among us by the name of Lady Mary Morton.”

“Such is her name,” interrupted the major; “but she has two other names in addition, and by those she was wont to be called—Gertrude Mary Morton Manyacre; my Gertrude, my wife.”

“She told me,” continued Noel, “that the exigence of the case, and that alone, made her feel it right to repeat to me her friend’s story; and she added, that her disappointed affection had embittered her life until my little Joanna had persuaded her to make a daily prayer to God for reconciliation. This has only been since the ill-

ness of which I told you, and Lady Mary's character has become softened and sweetened in a marvellous degree in consequence."

Major Manyacre made no reply, he was weeping bitterly. Noel continued,—

"If you will return with me she will but feel that her prayers are answered. Since she began to pray, hope has continually strengthened in her mind; it has at once familiarized her with the idea of a reunion and strengthened her desire for it."

"It is far more than I deserve at her hand!" he exclaimed, beneath his breath; "I have wronged her cruelly!"

Again a silence ensued, which the major broke by a sudden remark on the subject from whence they had started.

"Of course, Elliott, you will forgive your sweet little Joanna?"

Elliott laughed.

"I have nothing to forgive, major. My displeasure against her was only feigned, to enlist you against yourself in the case we have just so

fully and successfully discussed. In what Joanna has done she had my full consent and approbation ; indeed, I inserted the advertisement myself."

" Oh, you Jesuit ! How dare you treat me so ! Well, I suppose the end justifies the means, and I must forgive your indefensible mode of attack for the service you have thereby rendered to humanity. When do you propose to take me down to Irskill ? "

" At once, certainly, if you feel equal to the journey. But, after such agitation, it would perhaps be better that you should have a good night's rest."

" My eagerness declares for the forced march," replied the soldier ; " but I am getting an old man, and must consider my own weakness a little. My whole being is convulsed with this shock, and I shall best consider her feelings by waiting to put my own nerves into a quieter state before meeting her. All things duly weighed, I think it will be the safest to defer our journey till to-morrow."

Noel agreed with his friend, and so wrote a line to Joanna to relieve her solicitude for Lady Mary; but he did not tell her of his full success, only gave her information enough to cheer her spirits.

“All is going well, dearest,” he wrote; “I am full of hope. Remember, your only reason for the least delay in our marriage was the desolation of Lady Mary. I shall expect you to allow me to name a very early day whenever Major Manyacre rejoins his wife.”

CHAPTER XVII.

RECONCILIATION.

Farewell grief! I am stored with
Two blessings most desired in human life,
A constant friend, an unsuspected wife.

Duke of Milan.—MASSINGER.

THE September sun shone gloriously upon the garden at Fairlawn, revealing the velvet depths in the cupped petals of the ruby-coloured dahlias, and drawing forth the faint scent of the African marigolds; while the fuchsia-bells trembled in the light breeze, and rays of phosphorescent lustre danced around the clusters of scarlet geranium. Joanna Wallstein stepped cautiously across the dewy grass, her little feet encased in the goloshes to which Mr. Elliott attached such importance, and the abundant drapery of her green-speckled muslin dress drawn over one arm, to save it from

contact with the damp sward. She wandered leisurely round the garden, for Lady Mary was late for breakfast, and Joanna was enjoying the freshness of the morning air. She paused, where a rotten stump gave shelter and home to various delicately-formed ferns, and wondered to behold a nest of orange-cups, some as large as a hen's egg, snugly ensconced among the fern foliage, their glowing tint thrown out in great perfection by the dark tint of the bark behind them, and the darker mould out of which they grew.

“Poor despised funguses!” she exclaimed, “the phosphorescent light is dancing about you, as well as about the geranium blooms; why does every one despise you?”

She gathered some of the orange-cups and of the fern sprays, sought out a quantity of rich purple verbena, and, adding some jasmine to her group, carried her treasures within doors. Lady Mary not having yet appeared, she proceeded to arrange her treasures in a flat dish, fringing the circumference with feathery ferns, and placing a deep border of the purple, with

the orange-cups in strong contrast in the centre. Then she brooched some fuchsia sprays into her own dress and placed a bouquet of jasmine on Lady Mary's plate. Just as she did so her friend entered.

"I fear I have kept you waiting a very long time, my darling; but I have passed such a bad night, and had such strange dreams, that I felt weary this morning, and allowed myself to go to sleep again when I ought to have risen."

"You look weary still. You should have taken your breakfast in bed, dear Lady Mary."

"No, dear, that would not have done me any good. The fact is, Joanna, I am at war with myself. I am fully aware that Mr. Elliott wishes to marry immediately, and that your only reason for withholding your consent to his most reasonable request is, your dread of leaving me alone. Several times I have made up my mind to speak to you of this, and each time my courage has failed. Alas! I am a sad coward."

"It is abundantly good time to speak now, dear Lady Mary; Mr. Elliott did not press me on the subject till the other day."

“My dear, I am quite conscious he has been chafing against the delay for some time, but he told Mrs. Jans he could not bear to unsettle you. And, surely, he begged you to hasten matters some time ago?”

“Oh, yes, very early in our engagement. And I gave all my orders at once, and really my preparations are complete. Only, as he had not named the subject recently, I felt things could stand over, and I rest a while beside you.”

“It was his delicate consideration for you and for me, love, and we must not continue to let him sacrifice himself for us. As your adopted mother, I shall take upon myself to speak to him on the subject, and I shall tell him that it will be a relief to me if he will take you away. I shall not engage a companion again, dear; I will have people to stay with me from time to time, but I could not bear any one after you!”

“But you must have some companion, dear Lady Mary?” said Joanna.

“No, by no means. You have been my young sister, living with me because of our mutual love and dependence, and receiving all you have had

occasion for from me, because our Father has put the inheritance into my hand, and not yours. I am thankful that you will live near me; this thought greatly softens our separation; without it, indeed, I know not of what weakness I might be guilty."

Fearing that she was yielding to too sentimental a tone, the kind woman dashed off to speak of general subjects, admired Joanna's bouquet, fastened her own flowers in her dress, was eloquent in praise of the weather, and was meditating an attack on politics, when the letters were brought in. Joanna seized hers eagerly, and at a glance made herself mistress of its contents. Lady Mary's share of the post-bag consisted in some settled accounts for Joanna's trousseau, which she had recently discharged.

"Have you heard from Mr. Elliott, dear?" she asked.

"Yes. He does not say when he is returning." She paused a few moments, and then she added, in a lower tone, "but he says that, when he returns, he hopes to find me prepared to agree to an early day for our marriage."

“How glad I am I had the first word on the subject,” exclaimed Lady Mary, triumphantly. “If I had waited another hour I should have lost the chance of giving you up gracefully; while now that I have given you your freedom voluntarily, I can hold up my head like a brave woman. It has not often happened with me to do the right thing at the right time. I shall take it as an omen for good!”

Joanna sank to the footstool at Lady Mary’s feet, and taking both her hands she said,—

“My dearly-loved friend, I am sure it is an omen for good. I know that brighter days lie before you. I feel that God will give you what you once asked for me, ‘Rest in the house of your husband!’”

Lady Mary gazed earnestly in the beautiful face lifted in such loving hopefulness to hers. None could doubt the truth expressed in Joanna’s eyes. There was ever a thoughtfulness in them that would have verged on melancholy, but for the truthful courage which rectified the expression. Now, their inmost depths spoke eloquently the faith of her heart; and Lady Mary, thirsting for

love and reconciliation, drank of the well of hope and faith which she found in them.

“My child,” she said, in whispered tones, “my love to my husband has grown enormously, I had almost said terribly, since you persuaded me to make him the subject of my daily prayer. Were all hope of reconciliation to be taken from me now, I believe I could not live. I sometimes feel awestruck at this risk.”

“No, Lady Mary, there is no risk. In the increase of the desire for reconciliation lies God’s guarantee for the gift of it. Our lawful, human desires, when thus spread before Him, are not permitted to increase and gather strength if the answer in His secret purpose is ‘No.’ Then the desire becomes daily weaker, till we wonder at last whether we ever did seek it very earnestly. But when ‘Yes’ is in store for us, then we feel the desire to grow and grow, till life itself is wrapped up in the attaining of it.”

A servant entering to clear away the breakfast things interrupted their conversation; but they did not change their position, and when the door closed, Lady Mary spoke again.

“ My love to him, while I lived with him, was as nothing to my love for him now. I would gladly give up the remainder of the days that may be allotted me, to spend one week in his presence. Once to see his eyes rest on me lovingly, once to feel his kiss upon my lips, and I could say with Simeon, ‘ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation ! ’ ”

Lady Mary, at forty-five, was adorned with a more spiritual beauty than had rendered the Lady Gertrude the belle of every assembly. She had taken the flowers from her black dress, and as she was absently weaving them among Joanna’s dark locks, her eyes full of tears, and radiant with strong womanly affection, her pale cheek became tinged with the colour called up by that ecstatic hope. Thus they were sitting together, when, following a gentle rap, the door opened softly, and Major Manyacre entered.

Lady Mary saw him at a glance, fixed one look upon his countenance, and with a bound was in his arms.

Joanna saw that look of unutterable joy, and

with a delicacy and womanly tact she glided from the room, and left them to their happy reconciliation.

The sun has dried the grass now, and even Noel Elliott does not fear about the thin boots that traverse the lawn by his side. They seat themselves under the shade of an acacia-tree, though a premature frost, followed by wind and preceded by rain, has robbed it of half its leaves; and mischievous rays of sunshine play at hide and seek with the lovers, now, beating Joanna's raven locks till they threaten her with headache, and now, peering into the depths of her dark eyes, as if they would photograph every line of moss-agate which mingles in their intense hazel.

Cheerily they chat, his arm wound close around her; in her boundless joy she feels she has no power to refuse his request, and, truth to say, she has just as little will. "The wedding-dress is ready, all is fully arranged, why should three days not complete the preparations?"

"Why, indeed?" she replies; and then she bids him tell her, word for word, all the line of

intercession adopted in his interviews with the major.

She laughed merrily over the ruse he had be-taken himself to—"Such an abominable trick I could never have believed of you," she said. "I really cannot overlook it. First, you told falsehoods of me, and then you cited the Bible as your authority for so doing. You have given me a nice lesson for future practice. I shall give away your goods as the popish saint did, and tell you that they are only roses; you cannot condemn any subterfuge in me after showing me the way to use it."

"You shall give away what you like, so long as you give your love to no one but me," he replied, looking confidently in her face.

"Oh, don't hope for that," she answered merrily; "I will give that to every beggar in the street, every child in the village. I will love everything that comes in my way."

"Do so, dearest," was his reply. "The wider you extend your sympathies, the more intensely you will concentrate your holiest love upon him to whom you have given your immovable faith."

She saw she could not tease him, and gloried in the strong reliance which would not be shaken. Two hours had passed thus, seeming but a few minutes, when the drawing-room window was thrown up, and the major stepped forth, handing the Lady Mary through the opening. They advanced together; his fine soldier-like bearing well suited to her tall handsome figure. As they approached, the lovers rose to meet them, and as Lady Mary presented Joanna she said gently, "Are you prepared to adopt a daughter, Lovel?"

"That is a serious question, especially as it involves the adoption of a son too, and that my much esteemed mentor," he replied playfully; but taking both Joanna's hands, he gazed earnestly in her face, and then pressing his lips to her brow, he whispered,—“God bless you, sweet girl, and reward you sevenfold for all you have done for my forsaken wife.”

It now became patent to all concerned, not only that no further reason existed for delaying the marriage of Noel and Joanna, but that there were several excellent reasons for hastening it; for

both Major Manyacre and Lady Gertrude would be far better left alone, yet neither of them would hear of Joanna removing to Sylvester, or in any way withdrawing herself from Fairlawn as a home, until her marriage gave her into other hands. In consequence, Noel gave directions for the electric wires to be set in motion, and the last orders were conveyed by them to London tradesmen, to be executed forthwith.

On the day preceding the marriage, Noel Elliott entered the breakfast room at Fairlawn, before the trio had risen from table,—“The top of the morning to you, squire; what has set you afloat so early?”

“A paragraph in the *Times*. I wanted to be the first to show it to Joanna.”

“Then thank the consideration of your friends and not your own good luck that you are not forestalled. My eye fell upon it, and I gave such a chuckle that I nearly choked myself with my coffee, and Miss Wallstein dutifully recommended me to touch my forehead, and look up at the ceiling as her mamma had always recommended her to do

on similar occasions, which advice was nearly causing me a relapse."

"I never knew you were a quiz, major, until now. You never poked fun at people when you were quartered at Overstone."

"Oh, no, I was a solemn old bore then. But I used to have some nonsense in me in old days, had I not, Gertrude?"

"Yes, that you had!" replied Lady Gertrude, proudly.

"But what of your paragraph, Mr. Elliott?"

"This," replied Elliott, drawing a chair close to Joanna, and taking her hand in his. "It is a notice to the firm of Wallstein, Filmer and Co., announcing that every claim against the firm was liquidated in full three years ago by the son of the principal partner then residing in India."

"My noble Ernest!" exclaimed Joanna; but her voice was husky, and she tried to hide that there were tears in it, by a nervous cough.

Major Manyacre suggested that she should touch her forehead and look up at the ceiling, which had the effect of making her smile, and

restoring her self-command. After a little while she turned to Noel, and said, playfully,—

“It is now in my power to act up to the scheme you invented for me, and give away my fortune without your leave, and without telling you to whom. But I must be brisk in my movement; the deed of gift must be executed to-day, or the power goes from me!”

He smiled at the first part of the sentence, raising his hand as if he would strike her on the ear, but arresting its motion before any collision occurred, and pleased to see her start aside, as if to escape his blow; but he looked grave at the latter part of her remark, and replied,—

“Most true, there is no time to be lost. Are you riding into Overstone, major? I must go thither directly.”

The gentlemen agreed to go together, but Joanna stole to the door to Noel, and said, “You surely knew that I was in play, dear Noel?”

“Yes, darling, you were in play, but your fiction suggested a fact to me that proper directions about your fortune must be inserted in the

settlements. Major Manyacre, as your brother's executor, will act with me in this matter, and we shall get it done during the day. I cannot be sufficiently thankful that you named this point, for otherwise our marriage must have been postponed."

"Really, how strange! But suppose I had not inherited this money till after our marriage?"

"Then it would have been settled according to your brother's will."

"And how is that?"

"I don't know. Major Manyacre will explain the law of the matter to me, he is up in the business. Good-by for the present, darling; I will look in in the evening."

As the friends rode towards Overstone together Major Manyacre questioned his companion.

"Why are you in such a fever about the settlement of this property, Elliott?"

"Because it is the last day on which any settlement can be effected."

"Precisely so; but it is more to your interest that no settlement of it should be made."

"I should be hurt by your remark if I believed you in earnest, Major Manyacre. I stand to Joanna in place of father and brother, as well as in that of intended husband; you surely do not think me capable of acting for my own interest to the neglect of hers?"

"I do not. Then you are going to settle this enormous fortune on herself?"

"Yes; her signature is alone requisite for so appropriating it."

"You have already made some settlement upon her?"

"Yes; eight hundred a year."

"My dear friend, you are overdoing the thing. Does she know of all this?"

"She knows nothing about money, further than that its best use is to pay debts with. She has an excellent understanding and could well cope with the subject, but I feared she might be reluctant in accepting, so I have not consulted her."

"Nor Lady Gertrude?"

"No. Her ladyship did me the honour to consult me as to whether I objected to many guests.

I told her that I had, happily, not been born shy, so was quite willing to face all the world and his wife, if it could be a pleasure to any one to see me made happy. Seriously, I felt it would be a pleasure to many to see Joanna in her bridal dress, and I was glad to let the world have so innocent an enjoyment. Is she not beautiful?"

"She is very beautiful, and very loveable. You are a lucky fellow, Elliott, and she is lucky too, for it is not every day that a woman finds a man so noble and disinterested as you are. She has every prospect of a lot as happy as her heart could desire!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WEDDING.

Oh, what a face was hers to brighten light,
And give back sunshine with an added glow,
To wile each moment with a fresh delight,
And part of memory's best contentment grow !
Oh how her voice, as with an inmate's right,
Into the stranger's heart would welcome go,
And make it sweet, and ready to become
Of white and gracious thoughts the welcome home !

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

NEVER did autumn sun shine more gloriously than on the morning of the wedding-day. Joanna thanked God for its brightness, as she looked forth on that familiar landscape where her home had been so long, but was soon to be so no longer. Her heart was full of solemn thankfulness ; solemn, because the step she was that day to take was the most responsible in woman's life ; thankful, because

she felt that he to whom she was about to plight her troth, was, what God would have him be, true, and faithful, and loving, bearing God's image in his soul. That glad gay sunshine she felt to be the emblem of God's smile.

She folded her dressing-gown round her, and a warm shawl above it, and then she knelt by the open window buried in deep thought. She had been engaged thus for more than an hour, when a light tap was heard at her door, and her permission to open was followed by the entrance of Kate Dawson, bearing her wedding-dress, and a basket of exquisite flowers.

"Dear Joanna, I have given Janet my last new ribbon to induce her to let me dress you! I know she is the principal bridesmaid, and ought to have had that honour. But no one has loved you as I have, and I think mine is the best right, is it not?"

"I think it is, darling. You have loved me very truly, Kate, and I have often felt glad and happy to think that you did so, but I have never thanked you for it. Take my thanks now, dear."

She kissed her warmly and repeatedly. Kate's eyes overflowed.

Joanna, I could not bear you to get married if I was not going to be married myself. Does not that sound selfish? But, you know, from the first time I saw you, ours has been more than even a plighted friendship. I have never forgotten a tone of your voice, nor a word that you have spoken, nor a look that has crossed your face. I was afraid of teasing you with professions, but, in my secret heart, I have worshipped you!"

"How strange! I cannot guess what makes people love me so, except that it is the good hand of God upon me!"

"No, it isn't, Joanna. If you were to do bad things, I should think them good, and try to do like them. It is just that you are such a fascinating creature that every one who sees you, or comes near you, is enthralled by you. I have often cried because I could not be of use to you, and built castles in the air in which I was to be your maid, and dress and undress you, and make your clothes, and read to you if you were ill,

and nurse you, and be as respectful to you as a Turkish slave, and weary my heart out by kissing your old slippers when you were out of sight."

"Dear little Kate, I am wholly unworthy of such love."

"No, you are not. I hate Mr. Elliott for the calm exultation of his tone, when he said, 'Tomorrow she will be all my own.' You are too great riches for any human being to possess; it is sacrilege to do other than worship you!"

Joanna blushed and laughed.

"Dear Kate, you will not lose me. I shall come back to Elliott's Cray, and live only a mile and a half from you. Come, you may dress me now, and consider me to be made of common clay."

Kate dropped upon her knees to dress the delicate feet, ejaculating,—

"I feel so much better for having got my mind relieved."

The toilette progressed slowly, for Kate stopped every five minutes to indulge in a fresh rhapsody; at last, there remained nothing more than to loop

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up the lace-sleeves with strings of pearls out of the precious casket; to twine the natural orange-blossom sprays with a similar costly cord, and to mingle larger strings in the coils of raven hair which lay under and above the wreath of flowers. Kate stood back to take a bird's-eye view of her idolized friend. She advanced to readjust the folds of her ample veil, added bouquets of orange-flowers to loop up the deep lace flounce on her snowy dress, and then exclaimed, "Beautiful, perfect, my chieftainess," and, kneeling, kissed her hand. Janet came to bid Kate hasten the completion of her own toilette; and the enthusiastic girl hurried away to don the scarlet verbena wreath, and arrange her glossy curls and filmy veil to suit it.

There had been a serious consultation as to the right person to act father on this important occasion. All deferred to the faithful Jans, but he was equally decided in favour of Major Many-acre.

"Let us do as the parsons do," suggested the latter; "assist each other, and divide the honour

between us. It will read well in the papers—
‘the lovely bride was given away by Wilhelm Jans, Esq., her oldest friend, assisted by Major Manyacre, of her Majesty’s Fifth Regiment of Dragoons.’”

“I don’t think it could be done,” replied Jans.
“I don’t see how two men could take the bride’s hand at once, and put it into that of the bridegroom.”

“No difficulty whatever, my dear fellow, to an enterprising mind! Why, I have seen one bishop, one archdeacon, and five beneficed clergy get their hands on to the head of one candidate for holy orders; and I see no difficulty in two men taking hold of one girl’s arm. But if you prefer doing all the work, I’m not the man to spoil your sport by trying for a share.”

“In good earnest, Major Manyacre, I would rather you took the office upon you altogether. I can pray for a blessing on my pretty favourite just as well, or better, if I am not acting as her father; whilst you, both as the husband of the Lady Gertrude, and the chosen friend and executor of her

brother, are the right man for the office. Let us consider the matter settled."

There was an earnestness and decision about the philosopher which forbade further discussion, and thus the honour of giving away that dainty bride fell on Major Manyacre.

Joanna is left alone, for the carriages containing the bridesmaids and the rest of the party are driving off. Lady Gertrude has stolen into the room for a few precious minutes, and, unembarrassed by her delicate and costly attire, the bride embraces her with the fondest caresses. But the sweet interchange of loving words between these two full hearts is stopped by the firm step of the major, who comes to take his daughter by adoption to the carriage.

The wedding party accomplish the short distance between Fairlawn and the churchyard gate in a very short space of time. The village seems deserted; but, when they reach their destination, they soon understand what has become of the people. From the gate to the church door the path is bordered by so thick a wreath of ever-

greens, that it resembles a little hedge, and such flowers as the season affords are mingled in it, as marigolds, dahlias, and, prettiest of all, hollyhocks. Outside this dwarf hedge stands a file of village girls, to whom the squire has not only given white ribbons, but white alpaca frocks, and scarcely a mother in the church to-day but has already decided what colour her little one's frock is to be dyed when its original use is over. Every child has a nosegay; some, baskets full of flowers; and others, garlands; and the effect of the grouping is perfect.

Gregory has been constituted master of the ceremonies; and, as the carriages deposit their burdens at the gate, he marshals the ten maids of honour round to the church door.

"Form in two lines in the porch," he said, "that the bride may pass into the church between you."

But six full-dressed ladies fill the porch, and the other four looked rather dismayed at the prospect of having to stand outside, and looked appealingly to Kate.

"Oh, dear, what does that signify!" exclaimed she, leaving her place as foremost of the left-hand

line. "One of you change places with me, and I will stand outside. None of us need be the least afraid of any one looking at us. The moment the bride appears we shall be thought worthy of no more attention. I don't see that we signify at all in the matter, except just to do honour to her!"

The murmurs were silenced. Gentlemen and other guests grouped themselves at once on either side the door, or stole quietly into the church to find places at leisure; and Gregory's critical eye pronounced all right, as Major Manyacre approached leading the bride along the path, now carpeted with flowers.

Her exquisite form suits admirably with that graceful bridal garb, her delicately-formed head is slightly bent, and she looks the happiness she feels, as she passes between the lines of bridesmaids, and they, close behind her, following in well-matched pairs, till they reach the communion rails. Noel Elliott emerges from the vestry door, and stands to receive his bride.

Well may the church be crowded, for this is a high festival to every being on the estate of Elliott's

Cray, and there is scarcely any property in the parish that owns another master. All acknowledge Noel to be the best of a race of good landlords and kind masters, and every heart overflows with eagerness to seek blessings for him. Joanna is as much admired as he is beloved; but her unimportant position in the village has prevented her from being known, except as "Lady Mary's pretty young lady."

Mr. Marriott has the satisfaction of performing the service unassisted, to Dr. Quiller's great mortification. "That fellow Marriott will pocket at least five pounds on this occasion," he said, "and be treated as an honoured guest into the bargain. I used to be sought by all the country-side for such matters, but people show me no respect now." The emphasis laid on the word "now," formed one link in a chain of uncomfortable associations extending through the twenty-four hours, to the meaning and application of which Mrs. Quiller was well accustomed, and also case-hardened.

While the short service is proceeding, a party of the servants and retainers of Elliott's Cray

are erecting a triumphal arch, prepared beforehand in honour of her whom they were hereafter to know as their mistress. The arch is a mass of green, excepting where letters formed in hollyhocks, white, yellow, lilac, and red, present these words on the church side, —“God shall bless thee out of Zion;” while on the side facing the road is the sentence—“Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.” They have just finished their well-adjusted work, when the congregation begin to swarm out of the church. All emerge, but none go away. They wait outside for one more peep at the bride.

The poor little cripple, Susan Price, has been carried to the church by her parents to see the grand show, and her tame dove has accompanied her. The bird is pinioned, to prevent its being lured away by the neighbouring pigeon cotes, but, in the confusion of leaving the church, it loses its friends, and nods along the flowery path alone.

Gregory cleared the road authoritatively, requiring man, woman, and child to betake themselves to the sward and sit thereon, or otherwise dispose

of themselves, only to leave the way clear for the bride; he saw the dove, too, but he never thought of removing it. The village children, again ranged outside the flowery borders, stooped to catch the dove whenever they could elude the keen watch of Gregory, but the dove resisted being caught. One gave a pull to one wing, another to another; some pretty feathers were torn away in the wanton play, and the right wing was sprained. When the bride appeared, none thought further of the dove, the children's whole attention being turned to her; and the village matrons looked wistfully on their beautiful new mistress, wishing her many a long and happy day in her own and her husband's home.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HARVEST HOME.

Ay, thou art welcome, heaven's delicious breath;
When woods begin to wear the crimson leaf,
And suns grow meek, and the meek suns grow brief,
And the year smiles as it draws near its death.
Wind of the sunny south! oh, still delay
In the gay woods and in the golden air,
Like to a good old age released from care,
Journeying, in long serenity, away.—BRYANT.

THEY are off and away, to spend their honeymoon, man and wife at last, pre-ordained to come together in this, the best state of human existence, notwithstanding all the obstacles which, from time to time, seemed gathering to prevent it.

Did they go north or south, east or west? One request Joanna made of her future husband, before the nuptial knot was tied, and it was that, after her marriage, she might revisit the scenes where

she had last travelled with her sainted mother, then her only protectress ; but now with him who would have taken the place of the dearest relatives she had ever known.

It was amidst these scenes, too, where she had first met with the kind-hearted philosopher, Mr. Jans, who had been so instrumental in all that had related to her welfare since her mother's death, and to whose kindness, indeed, she owed so much of her past happiness and its promise for the future. They, therefore, selected once more the valley of the Rhine, where, for a while, we will leave them touring at their own free will, and return to Elliott's Cray, where Mr. and Mrs. Jans are the presiding genii, and where abundant good things, already in display, testify to the care which has been bestowed upon them, and pre-indicate the harmony of the holiday which the wedding has occasioned. And it is not to be a common holiday, but one in which several events are to be combined in celebration. First, of course, is the wedding of Noel and Joanna ; then, the reunion of Major and Lady Mary Manyacre ; and,

lastly, Mr. and Mrs. Jans and good aunt Bertha are to be jotted into the same group, with all the unpleasant past forgotten, and all the future filling in the landscape with its freshness. How the evening was spent under such circumstances it is scarcely necessary to chronicle; for it is a part of a very old story, which has varied very little within the oldest recollections. Each imagination may conjecture for itself, the shaking of hands, heads and feet, to the sound of merry strains far into the twinkling night, that took place on so joyous an occasion.

By one of those thoughtful acts for which he was always so distinguished, Noel had not only invited all the villagers of the neighbourhood to this festivity, and killed the fatted calf, and provided abundance of the very best home-brewed; but they, again, were permitted to extend the same kind invitation to distant relatives of theirs, so that for each family the one occasion was made a happy opportunity of associating their own reunions with the commencing happiness of the bride and groom.

What airs Gregory assumed, how he led off the dance with Mrs. Jans, whilst the housekeeper followed with Major Manyacre, and Lady Mary with the faithful philosopher, who, for this once, forgot both his studies and himself, and tripped it with the best of them; and how couple after couple filled up the long line of dancers in the stately hall of the Elliotts, awakened from its long and wearisome silence to the gladdest of all rejoicings, will be best learnt by the following letter from Lady Mary to Mrs. Elliott, which followed her, ten days after her marriage, to Bonn, and reached her just as she and her husband were taking the steamboat for Mayence.

“ Elliott’s Cray.

“ MY VERY DEAR JOANNA,—

“ I WRITE, you see, from your home, where my dear husband and I have been visiting your good aunt Bertha for the last day or two, keeping her company in lieu of those whom, it is no disparagement to us to say, she loves far better, and whom she is already absolutely longing to have back again. You see that I still call you ‘my very dear Joanna!’ Well, Mr. Elliott may

permit me so far to encroach upon his privileges ; for you were *my* dear before you were *his* ; and with a woman's will, I must continue to call you so, even if he and I should quarrel over it ; and, therefore, you may make my kindest regards to him and tell him so.

“ You are anxious, no doubt, to hear from England, from home (treasure that word all the days of your life), to know whether there is yet a mansion at Elliott's Cray, or whether it has been burnt down amid the bonfires and fireworks which blazed and sparkled and shone on the wedding-night ; or, if not absolutely so bad as that, whether the house or furniture has sustained any injury from the delirium of the persons who took possession of it almost as soon as you and your husband had fairly turned your backs upon it. Assure yourself, then, that not the smallest damage has been sustained by anything, or by anybody. The house is quite itself again, and the people who were so giddy upon that occasion have relapsed into the soberness of the quiet lives we have been so long accustomed to see them pass among us.

“ Only fancy, that Mrs. Jans had the audacity

to make the first advances to Signor Gregorio for Sir Roger de Coverley; that my husband, Lovel, danced with Mrs. Hisinglass; and that I had the moral courage to 'do Mr. Jans the honour' of 'wetting the floor' with him in the same wonderful extravaganza. I need only tell you that we danced 'Sir Roger' with thirty couples, to give you an idea of the crowd we were in, and of the noise and fun in which we indulged; and you will believe me, I am sure, when I add also, that I kept my bed all the next day, in order to obtain an average amount of rest to make good my state of previous exhaustion.

"After supper, which, by the way, took place at one o'clock in the morning, the health of the bride and groom was proposed in an admirable speech by Mr. Marriott, and was responded to with nine times nine, and one cheer more, for the good of the house! Then Mr. Jans added a few words respecting a lady friend of mine, which I shall not repeat, lest I mar your husband's happiness by increasing your vanity. You see that as long as you were under my guidance and govern-

ment, I knew exactly how far I could go with you ; but now that you are under other authority, and that of a supreme character, I must be doubly prudent, lest I should be called to account.

“ And after all, what folly it was in me to laugh at your aunt’s anxiety (for I can now really call her so) Bertha, I mean, when she expressed a wish that you would not be long away: for even though I am writing to you, and my own dear husband is near me, and only ten days have elapsed since you left us, I begin to wish so too. I want you to witness my, our happiness—mine and Lovel’s.

“ Here we are, we who have been so long separated, and have lost half our days, endeavouring mutually to make good that loss, by deepened affection, and by enjoying everything within our reach. And a happy wife am I, thus restored to the husband of my first love; and a good and happy sister are you to have been so instrumental in giving me back this blessing! But, nevertheless, we are both of us selfish enough to desire to hear your voice again, where it has so

long been accustomed to be heard, and to have our hearts gladdened by the brightness of your cheerful spirit.

“But I must not continue in such a selfish strain ; so listen to the Overstone budget of home news of the most recent date.

“You of course know, how earnestly Katie Dawson has been looking forward to something for her innamorato, by which she and he might put an end to their long betrothal, and be enabled to marry. But though curates’ prospects seem generally brightening rather, livings still remain few and far between. Elderly incumbents, like annuitants, belong to a class that cling to life with a very tenacious grasp ; and never die, if their appointments are very much wanted by somebody else. But, by a singular and fortuitous circumstance, Katie’s betrothed has been enabled to be of great service to a family of position and influence, where he was staying for a few days on a visit, on the occasion of a fire in the night, which, happily, was soon subdued, and mainly by his activity and exertion. ‘So, you see, parsons are

occasionally good for something outside the pale of their religious duties ; and the grateful owner has interested himself so much in his behalf with one who has many opportunities of being useful, that he is promised the first living that falls vacant. Such a probability, too, seems not to be very far distant, for the same presentor, or patron, has many livings in his gift, and some of considerable value ; so that pretty Katie sees a chance for her long engagement to terminate.

“For my part, I wonder that a woman of any reflection at all ever marries a curate ; or that a curate without a benefice ever dares to look a single woman in the face with any such aspiration. It is true that if he is a somebody, though only a seventh son with decimal expectations, and very handsome, he may possibly attract the notice of somebody else, who is a somebody, and willing to be espoused ; but, once married otherwise, he may be as excellent in his life and character as Jeremy Taylor, and as industrious and as wise as Franklin, these qualities will be of little use to him, either in helping him on in his profession, or in endea-

vouring to maintain his family. And, moreover, my dear, a working married curate is, in one respect, like all other hard-working men, the poorer the pay, the more children come to share the pittance; whilst, in another, the likeness is not continued. A working-man's children constitute his riches; they live together, work together, and together contribute to the family income: whilst a curate's children, for appearance sake only, help to make his gentility all the poorer.

"I'm sure we shall all, however, be glad to congratulate Kate Dawson whenever her fortune may befriend her; and we shall be equally glad for her lover's sake, whom we all know to be an estimable person.

"The family history of Dr. Quiller, the unfortunate, has been broken off in the middle of the narrative, and there are the saddest rumours afloat about his last matrimonial speculation. He is at present in the hands of his creditors; though I should hardly say his, for the debts are nearly all those of Mrs. Hammerlye; and they, with her family, were all, it appears, that she brought him :

and who, in order to stop his recriminations, always contrives to have the first word, and to make it a very long one.

“You recollect the story of the borrowed diamonds, with which her eldest daughter absconded, when she eloped with that wretched person, Sir Henry Dalzell. It appears that, if they had not been lent to the family, Lady Dalzell would, in all probability, have had to answer for them, ere this, at the bar of justice. As it is, the lender can only bemoan her loss, and threaten the family with her displeasure, with disinheritance. But as the lady was the last surviving relative of Mrs. Quiller’s family, this disinheriting business may be very serious. She, we are informed, is the possessor of considerable wealth; and, but for this unhappy escapade, the Hammerlye tribe might, so far as outward appearances go, have been one day restored to that position in society which they have now irretrievably lost. Sir Henry Dalzell may, therefore, in respect to his wooings, be said to have been remarkably unfortunate; and where honesty of purpose might have

built up the baronetcy again, and supplied it with vigorous life, it will now die out quite, within a generation or two. Where this wretched couple are at present, nobody seems to be aware. The last that was heard of them was, that they were on the Continent; and that the baronet, after many attempts at getting a living had failed him, was now a sort of 'draw,' by which to inveigle silly young men of rank and fashion into the gaming-houses of Baden-Baden or Wiesbaden. It is asserted that the merest wreck of his family estates remains to him, quite insufficient, without other means, to support existence, even where life can be sustained on the cheapest materials. I just thought it might be interesting to you to know so much of the pretentious 'gentleman,' who ventured to offer you his title and fortune.

"Of Emma Hammerlye, nothing is acknowledged even by her own family. It is rather supposed that she is with her second sister, the only member of the family who has had the opportunity and the discretion to do well! But if she is, it is kept a profound secret from this neigh-

bourhood, and it is one which nobody wishes to penetrate. You will be glad to hear of Mr. and Mrs. Marriott, and of the good which has been effected by them and by their example, in the villages round about Overstone. The schools they have established, and the knowledge which has been imparted in them, (not merely this world's knowledge, to make men wise for time, but that which is to give them an inheritance that can never be taken from them,) is evidently bearing fruit in the improved demeanour of the children, and in the manners and social habits of their parents, which, since the days of poor Dr. Vansettle, have been so often a disgrace to us. Mr. Marriott fulfils all that could be expected of or hoped for in a country parson, and indeed of any clergyman; that is to say, he is a gentleman and a Christian. And his wife is a real Dorcas, spending her time and strength in the service of One, by whose merits she has herself been brought out of darkness into marvellous light; a light that she is always ready to reflect on those who have not yet emerged from the same darkness.

She seems to be impressed with the idea, that in districts where even married women are children yet, in the knowledge of the duties especially belonging to them (that kind of knowledge which makes home attractive and desirable to every member of the family,) it is no degradation to her to associate them with her in the performance of similar duties ; that they may learn them without seeming to be scholars, and that thus she may be able to point out to them where, and in what, they fail of success in anything they undertake. Moreover, if they need womanly counsel, there she is, always ready to afford it. And I, when I look upon this admirable woman, and the way she meets the thousand-and-one difficulties ever presenting themselves to her, in training these people in the discipline of life, the good she is silently effecting, and the evil that is falling before it, I feel sadly ashamed of myself for having been hitherto so ‘unprofitable a servant.’

“But when you return, my dear sister, we will take these matters into consideration fully. There is work for more labourers in this parish

vineyard; and He who cannot bear to see willing workers idle, will, doubtless, assign to us our duties, and accept and assist our humble services. Say everything that the sincerest affection can say from us to your husband, and to you, dearest Joanna. *Au revoir.*

“Your happy, faithful, and

“Devoted friend,

“GERTRUDE MARY MANYACRE.”

THE END.



